STARHENGE™

BOOK ONE - THE DRAGON AND THE BOAR

LIAM SHARP

STARHENGE

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Quotations adapted from Aaron Thompson's 1718 translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'The History of the Kings of Britain' as revised and corrected by J.A.Giles in 1842.

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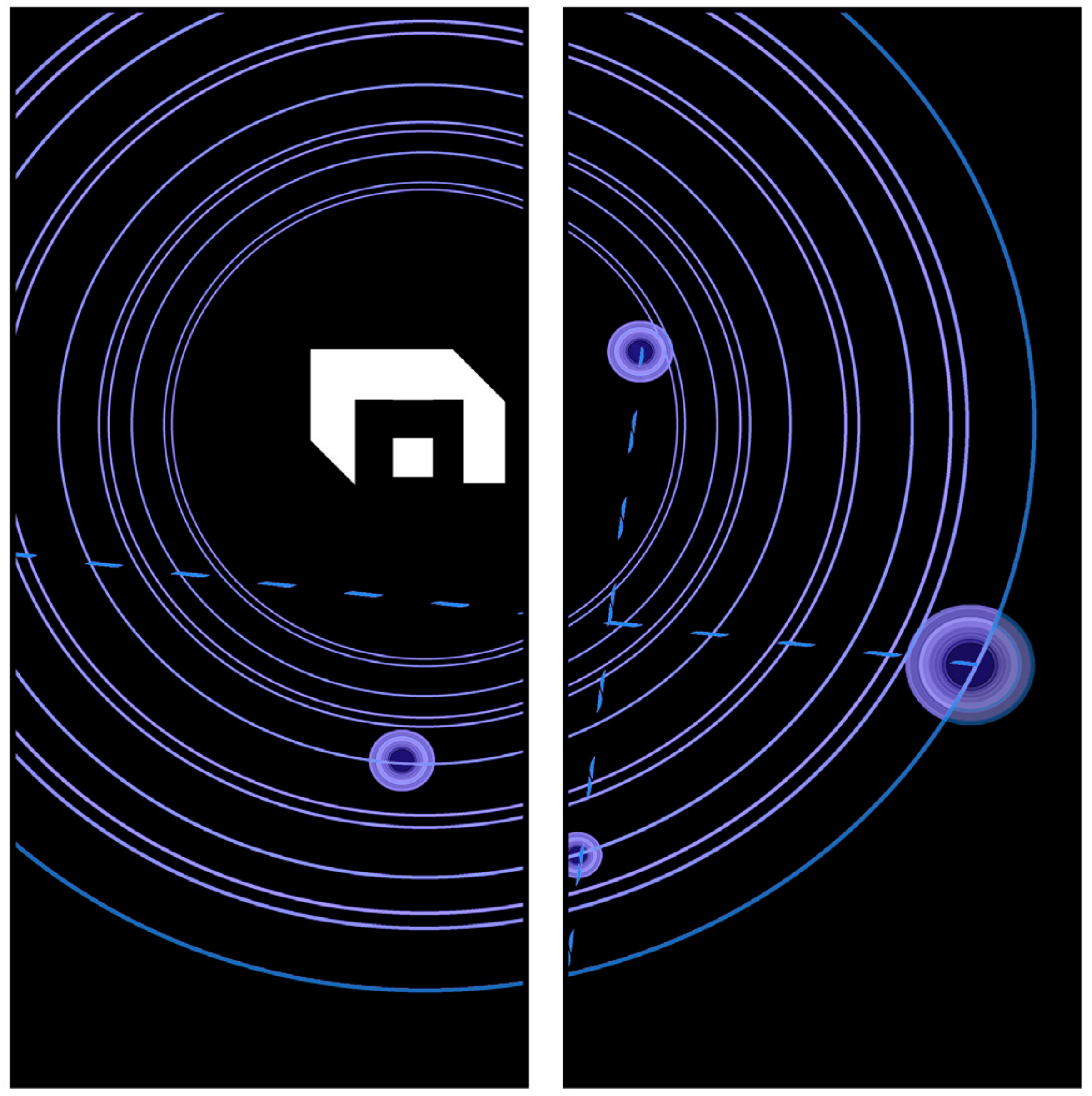
'Like a swirling and multi textured astral art dream - one falls through the hypnotic illustrations within the panels of Liam Sharp's work – as if tumbling head long in to a document of antiquity. Richly diverse in its artistic influences and inspiration, while interspersed with wonderfully quirky doodles of utterly irreverent humor. Book #6 of StarHenge continues to mine the rich seam of creative genius and illustrative beauty that Liam consistently brings to his visual storytelling, in a manner very few can rival.'

Sir Richard Taylor

'StarHenge feels like the culmination of years of Liam's thoughtful design, storytelling, drawing, illustrating, painting, digital work, and more, all rolled into one. He approaches imagery and storytelling in ways I can't begin to fathom. It's truly staggering what he's accomplished and everyone should check it out - and take some time with it, to truly absorb the width and breadth of work on these pages. It's mind boggling.'

Phil Jimenez



'How about giving Sharp a nod in the Best Professional Artist Hugo next year, because he absolutely deserves it.'

Salon Futura

'StarHenge succeeds by pure will of imagination. Sharp's passion and excitement are evident, palpable and contagious.'

The Beat

'Starhenge continues to be an accomplishment from Sharp that truly deserves the title of Epic. 5 stars.'

Comic Watch

'Writer and artist Liam Sharp turns it up to eleven on this issue with art that is evocative of Frank Frazetta… 10/10.'

TheComicon

'…a series that is among the most creative I have read in recent years. 10/10.'

The Comic Book Dispatch

'You are about to experience a next level artistic event by one of the great voices in all of comics. I am a huge fan of Liam and I cannot believe what a magnificent piece of comics art he has created!'

Brian Bendis

'Ok, this crushes. Seriously, "otherworldly" while not losing an ounce of heart. Far out stories always run the risk of losing their humanity, this story sacrifices none of that while delivering on the promise of esoteric high strangeness that I hunger for as a reader. Amazing work.'

Michael Conrad

'This is *astonishing* work. Jaw dropping and epic and massive and totally a LIAM SHARP book. This is a gorgeous and incredible and MASSIVE swing for the stars that declares his ambitions have taken him to some exciting and undiscovered territories. Do you know how rare that is?!? I don't remember the last time a comic - writing and drawing - was so surprising. This is so exciting. I am so excited FOR HIM. I am more excited FOR ME because this brilliant and insane and fabulous slab of new comics has crash-landed into my life.
Bravo, congrats, cheers, and exhale -- this is glorious.'

Matt Fraction

'Uniting futuristic world building with the wonderful world of the Arthurian mythology, Sharp has created one of the best modern masterpieces of comics.'

CBR

'Liam has outdone himself at every turn. He has reached for the stars. And the stars are scared as Hell.'

John Cassaday

'This book is SENSATIONAL!'

Mark Millar

With special thanks to:

Christina McCormack-sharp
Nick Abadzis
Darryl Stingley
Joe Elardy
Sir Don Lawrence

'Sharp's art is such a perfect fit for epic fantasy, it's a joy to see him add robots and spaceships into the mix as well.'

Entertainment Weekly

'The kind of 'epic' you crave - both noun and adjective. And even that doesn't quite capture LIAM SHARP's astonishing scope and vision. There's magic in these pages.'

Kelly Sue DeConnick

'Seamlessly combining documented historical fact, fable, excellent character writing, relatable narration and wonderfully detailed jaw dropping art. 10/10'

Comic Watch

'Liam Sharp's new Image Comics series StarHenge is one of the most ambitious sci-fi and fantasy projects to appear in comics in recent years, one that will push the artist to his very limits and perhaps consecrate him as one of the greatest in his generation.'

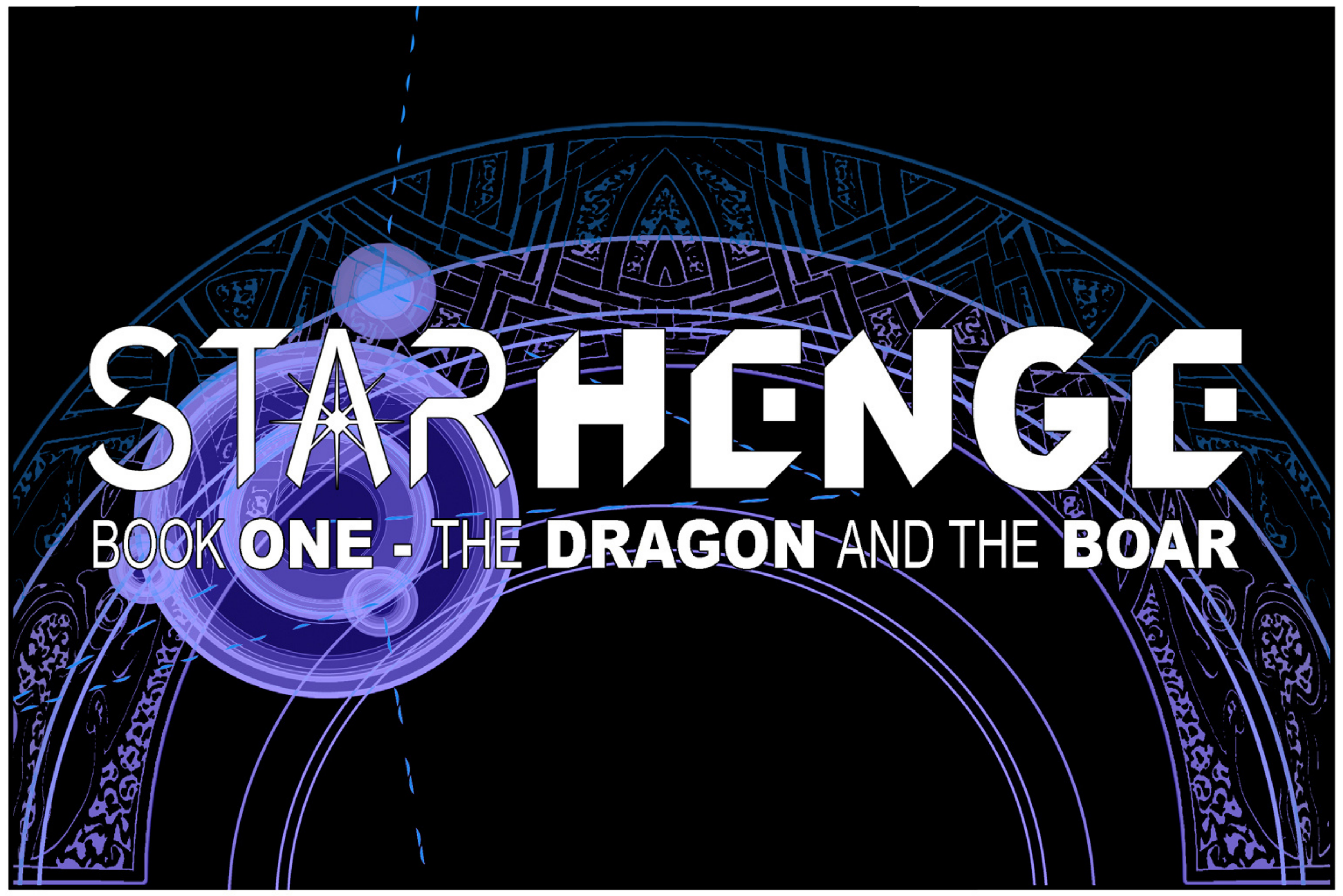
Screenrant

' I had neither expected nor anticipated this calibur of comic, and it felt brilliantly entertaining as I read it, a real masterpiece of the craft. 10/10.'

Down the Tubes

'Saga and Monstress perfectly exemplify this tradition of sprawling, deeply weird comics that simply work. Liam Sharp's StarHenge Book #1 belongs to that same lineage.'

Comicsbeat



STARHENGE

BOOK ONE - THE DRAGON AND THE BOAR

'Awesome… (And I almost never use the word.)'

Brian Bolland

'My god this is magnificent!'

Mark Raats

'I'll make it simple. StarHenge is the best comic you'll read this year.'

Gail Simone

'One of the great artists of our time at the top of his game. Absolutely epic.'

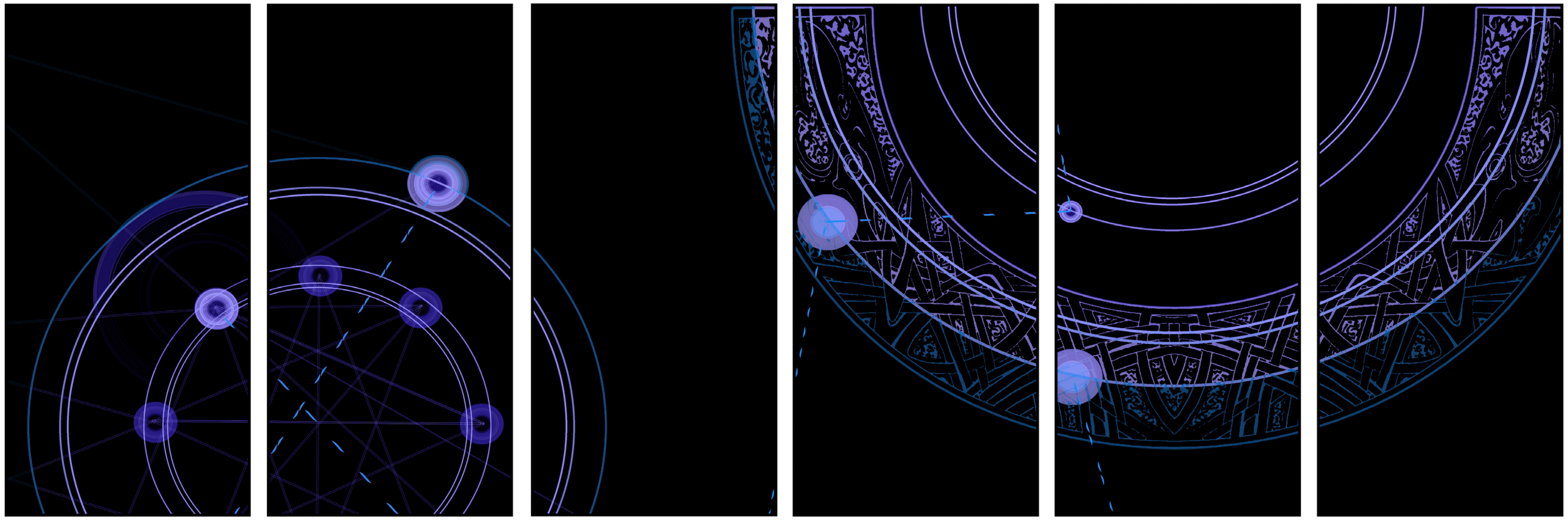
Tom King

'A star-spanning saga of ancient magic and deep science, vividly told by a modern master of the comics medium.'

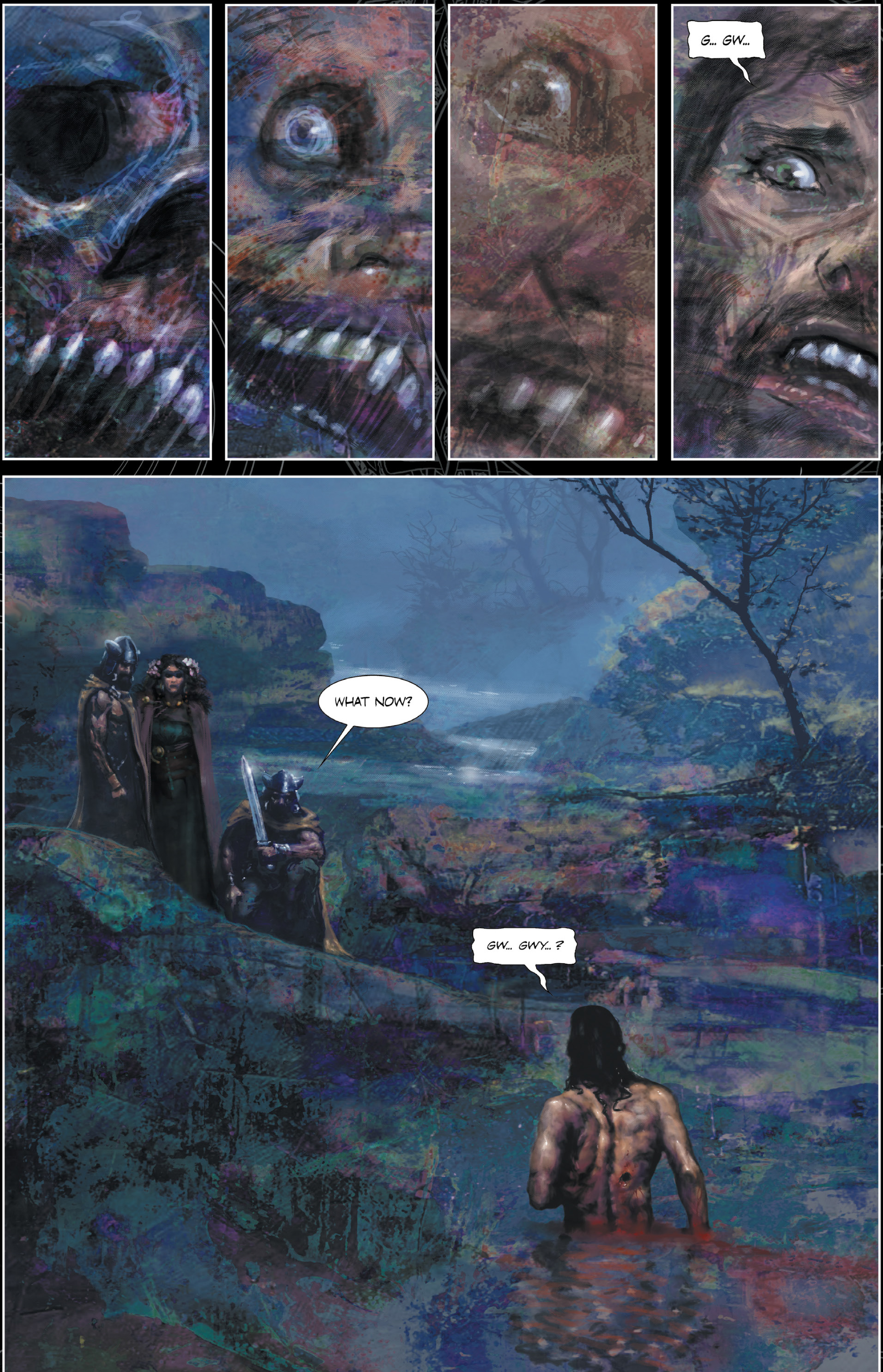
Dave Gibbons

'Absolutely incredible.'

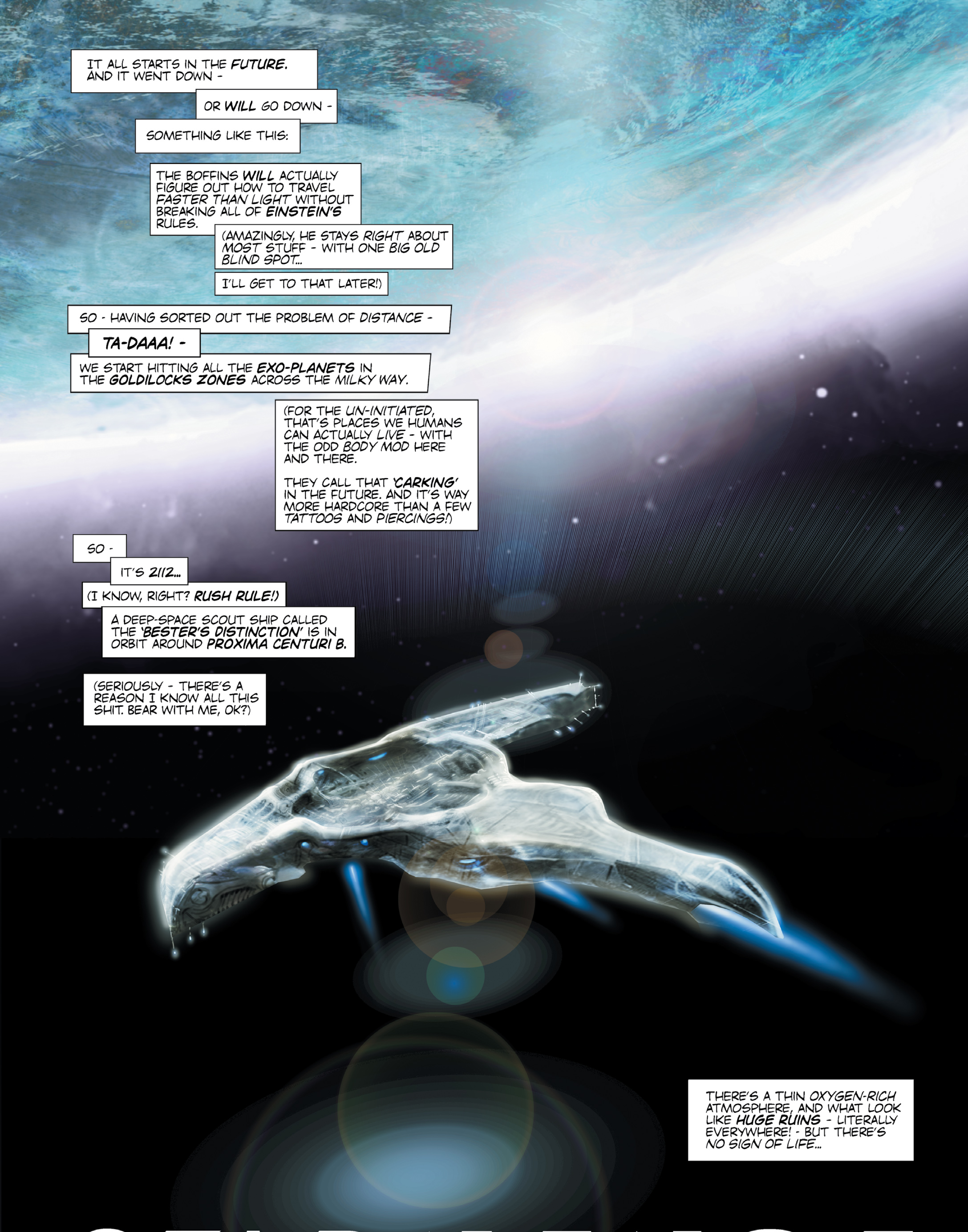
ComicBook.com



PROLOGUE:
'WOE UNTO THE RED DRAGON, FOR HIS END DRAWS NEAR
AND HIS CAVERNS SHALL BE OCCUPIED BY THE WHITE DRAGON THAT BETOKENS *THE SAXONS* WHOM YOU HAVE INVITED HERE.
THEREFORE, SHALL THE MOUNTAINS AND THE VALLEYS THEREOF BE MADE LEVEL PLANE
AND THE STREAMS OF THE VALLEYS SHALL **FLOW** WITH **BLOOD!**
AT LAST, SHE THAT IS **OPPRESSED** SHALL PREVAIL, AND RESIST THE CRUELTY OF THEM THAT CAME FROM WITHOUT.
FOR THE **BOAR OF CORNWALL** SHALL BRING SUCCOR
AND SHALL TRAMPLE THEIR NECKS BENEATH HIS FEET…'
- GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN


G... GW...
WHAT NOW?
GW... GWY... ?

FINISH IT.
DEVIL SPAWN!


IT ALL STARTS IN THE *FUTURE.* AND IT WENT DOWN -
OR *WILL* GO DOWN -
SOMETHING LIKE THIS:
THE BOFFINS *WILL* ACTUALLY FIGURE OUT HOW TO TRAVEL *FASTER THAN LIGHT* WITHOUT BREAKING ALL OF *EINSTEIN'S* RULES.
(AMAZINGLY, HE STAYS *RIGHT* ABOUT *MOST* STUFF - WITH ONE *BIG OLD BLIND SPOT...*
I'LL *GET* TO THAT LATER!)
SO - HAVING SORTED OUT THE PROBLEM OF *DISTANCE* -
TA-DAAA! -
WE START HITTING ALL THE ***EXO-PLANETS*** IN THE ***GOLDILOCKS ZONES*** ACROSS THE *MILKY WAY.*
(FOR THE *UN-INITIATED,* THAT'S PLACES WE HUMANS CAN ACTUALLY *LIVE* - WITH THE ODD *BODY MOD* HERE AND THERE.
THEY CALL THAT ***'CARKING'*** IN THE FUTURE. AND IT'S WAY MORE HARDCORE THAN A FEW *TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS!*)
SO -
IT'S *2112...*
(I KNOW, RIGHT? ***RUSH RULE!)***
A DEEP-SPACE SCOUT SHIP CALLED THE ***'BESTER'S DISTINCTION'*** IS IN ORBIT AROUND ***PROXIMA CENTURI B.***
(SERIOUSLY - THERE'S A REASON I KNOW ALL THIS SHIT. BEAR WITH ME, OK?)
THERE'S A THIN *OXYGEN-RICH* ATMOSPHERE, AND WHAT LOOK LIKE ***HUGE RUINS*** - LITERALLY *EVERYWHERE!* - BUT THERE'S *NO SIGN OF LIFE...*

STAR**HENGE**

BOOK ONE: **THE DRAGON AND THE BOAR**

THE CREW TOUCH DOWN TO CHECK IT OUT...
...WAKING UP THE LOCAL AI -
WHICH HAS BEEN DORMANT FOR A BAZILLION YEARS OR SOMETHING...
AND THE MACHINES - LIKE SOME KIND OF RUSTY, ANCIENT SKYNET - DO SOME REALLY BAD SHIT TO THESE POOR FUCKING ASTRONAUTS...
AND THEN THEY SHOOT DOWN THE 'BESTER'S DISTINCTION', SALVAGE THE SHIP'S MEMORY...
LEARN EVERYTHING THEY CAN -
ABOUT US. ABOUT EARTH...
...EVERYTHING.
AND THEY BUILD THESE REALLY CREEPY ROBOTS, HORRIBLE NIGHTMARE IMITATIONS OF HUMANS (IMAGINE IF TIM BURTON DIRECTED TERMINATOR!)
- SINCE IT SEEMS PRETTY CLEAR TO THEM THAT THE THING WE FEAR THE MOST IS OURSELVES.
(SICK, RIGHT? SHUDDER!)
AND, Y' KNOW, SINCE WE 'WEAR' MACHINES
(CARS, SPACESUITS, SPACESHIPS, GEDDIT?)
THEY DECIDE TO 'WEAR' US!
GROSS!
THEN - WELL, THEY GO TO WAR WITH US.
THEY BECOME KNOWN AS 'THE CAST' -
- SMELTED IN HELL, AND BURNISHED WITH THE BLOOD OF THEIR OWN MAKERS...

NOW TO MY BIT IN THIS STORY - WHICH I GUESS REALLY STARTS IN **CALIFORNIA.**
I WAS 18, STAYING WITH MY ***AUNT JULIA*** (WHICH IS A WHOLE 'NOTHER STORY)...
...BUT SPENDING MOST OF MY TIME WITH ***DARYL***, WHO'S A LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL HERO.
YEAH, I KNOW -
IT'S LIKE ***EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*** - BUT ***HE'S*** *WINONA RYDER...*
WHAT CAN I SAY?
WE JUST *IMMEDIATELY* HAD THIS *CRAZY* CONNECTION.

(TURNS OUT *EVERYTHING* WAS GOING TO BE ABOUT *CRAZY CONNECTIONS*, SO...)
HEY, WHAT'S *THAT* PHOTO? LOOKS WILD!
IT'S MY ***WICCA SHRINE.***
YO, AMBER! YOUR DRAWINGS ARE SWEET!
UHM. 'SWEET' THOUGH? *REALLY?*
I MEAN **GOOD**, RIGHT? LOOKS LIKE SOME SPOOKY DEVIL-ASS SHIT THOUGH! HA!
UH, YEAH.. NO.
OH YEAH. THAT'S MY THING. I BLAME MUM.
DAD TOO.
I'M A *WITCHY NERD.*
DEAL WITH IT.

WAIT, SERIOUSLY? THAT **HORNED DUDE**... ?
OK, EINSTEIN -
YOU KNOW THEY MADE THAT *CRAP* UP IN THE *5TH CENTURY*, RIGHT?
MY DAD SAID THERE WAS NO **DEVIL** - NOT LIKE THAT ANYWAY - BEFORE THE **CHRISTIANS** TOLD THE **CELTS** THEIR **HORNED GOD** WAS **EVIL**...
MOST PEOPLE THINK THE DEVIL HAS *ALWAYS* HAD HORNS, BUT HE DIDN'T.
THEY JUST MADE IT UP TO SUIT THEIR PURPOSES!
IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME...
THE *VICTORS* WRITE HISTORY.
NO SHIT? I DID NOT KNOW THAT!
IRONIC THIS PLACE IS CALLED **MOUNT DIABLO** THEN!
HA! YEAH! TRUE!
EVERYTHING IS SO BLOODY DIFFERENT HERE IN CALIFORNIA!
SOMEHOW IT'S NOT HOW I *THOUGHT* IT WOULD BE AT ALL...

REALLY? WHY? WHAT'S ENGLAND LIKE?
OLD.
REALLY FUCKING OLD.
HEY! YOU SHOULD COME OVER!
WHAT TIME YOU LEAVE TOMORROW? MAYBE I CAN DRIVE YOU TO THE AIRPORT?
I MEAN, IF YOU LIKE?
MY AUNT'S TAKING ME.
I'D RATHER GO WITH YOU, DARYL, BUT...
YOU KNOW.
WE'VE STILL GOT A FEW HOURS...
RIGHT! YEAH. YEAH... COOL.
SO, GET THIS:
THE SPANISH MISSIONARIES, LIKE TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, LOST SOME RUNAWAY NATIVE AMERICAN WORKERS - OUT IN THE SWAMP MIST...
THAT'S WHY THEY CALLED THIS AREA 'MONTE DIABLO'...
THE THICKET OF THE DEVIL...
El Camino Real.
Outline Map of California
TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STATE GEOLOGICAL
UNITED STATES SURVEYS
LATER, PEOPLE THOUGHT IT WAS JUST THE NAME OF THIS MOUNTAIN...
THEY WERE GOING TO CALL THE WHOLE AREA 'MOUNT DIABLO COUNTY', BUT IT FREAKED SOME PEOPLE OUT, SO... 'CONTRA COSTA COUNTY' IT IS!
Explorer of California 1542
USA
Juan Rodríguez CABRILLO
HA HA!
GOD, WHY ARE PEOPLE SO FUCKING BORING!?
I KNOW! RIGHT?
SEE? I DO KNOW SOME SHIT! SO EINSTONE IS ACTUALLY RIGHT, K?
'EINSTONE'?
HAHAHA!!! FUCK!!!
HEY, YOU KNOW WHAT IS FUNNY THOUGH?
HERE, THERE'S MOUNT DIABLO.
JUST OUTSIDE OF BRIGHTON, WHERE I'M FROM?
THE DEVIL'S DYKE.
SO ANYWAY - LIKE I SAID - I'M INTO MAGIC...

...WHICH YOU'LL FIND OUT IS *IMPORTANT*.
BECAUSE IF THIS STORY IS ABOUT *ANYTHING*, IT'S ABOUT ***MAGIC!***
RIGHT - *BACK TO THE FUTURE!* AND IT'S THESE TRULY KICK-ARSE ***KNIGHTS OF THE VELDT*** THAT KEPT
(KEEP?)
THE ***CAST*** AT BAY USING A MIX OF ***MAGIC*** AND ***TECHNOLOGY***, BECAUSE IT TURNS OUT THAT'S THE *SINGLE THING* THE ***CAST*** CAN'T GET THEIR COLD MACHINE NOGGINS AROUND -
MAGIC DOES NOT COMPUTE!
IT IS FUCKING ***TOTALLY ILLOGICAL***!
MAGIC'S THE BIT THAT *EINSTEIN* DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT.
BUT THEN, IN ***HIS*** TIME
- THE AGE LEADING UP TO ***MY*** TIME. OR AT LEAST, MY *VERSION* OF THAT TIME.
(WHAT CAN I SAY? IT'S *COMPLICATED!*) -
MAGIC DIDN'T REALLY EXIST.
(THERE'S A REASON FOR THAT, TOO...)
FAST-FORWARD A FEW DECADES AND IT STARTS TO LOOK PRETTY HORRIBLY *BLEAK* FOR HUMANITY...
THE ***CAST*** WIPE OUT
(WIPED OUT?)
THE KNIGHTS - AND EVERYBODY ***FORGOT***
(FORGETS?) THEM.
COMPLETELY.
IT'S ***LITERALLY*** LIKE THE KNIGHTS ***NEVER EXISTED.***
THEY'RE JUST ***DREAM JUICE.***
NEVER REALLY HAPPENED.
AND AFTER THAT THINGS GOT ***REALLY BAD.***
OR ***WILL*** DO.
(OR, MORE PROPERLY, ***IS DOING.*** BECAUSE IT TURNS OUT EVERYTHING IS ALL GOING ON AT ONCE.
I DON'T PRETEND TO FULLY UNDERSTAND IT, BUT YOU'VE SEEN ***DOCTOR WHO?***
IT'S *TIMEY-WIMEY* SHIT.)

SO THEN THERE'S THIS GUY, **WYLLT.**
(APPARENTLY IT MEANS **'WILD'**. UHM. RIIIIIGHT.)
AND BELIEVE IT OR NOT, YOU **DEFINITELY** ALREADY KNOW HIM!
BEAR WITH ME -
IN THE *FUTURE* THERE'S THIS PRETTY FUCKING AMAZING **UR-QUEEN,**
WHO'S LIKE THE HEAD OF THE GREAT HUMAN EXPANSION.
WYLLT'S HER **SON** -
HER LAST SURVIVING CHILD.
AND HE COULD BE REALLY, LIKE, ALL KINDS OF BRILLIANT
- YOU KNOW, HE'S BEEN **CARKED** BY THE FINEST *MOD-SMITHS*.
GUY'S PRACTICALLY IMMORTAL! -
BUT HE **HATES** FIGHTING, AND HE'S EASILY...
UHM...
DISTRACTED...
THERE ARE STILL SOME **DREAD-NAUGHTS** HEADING IN FROM THE EAST, WYLLT...
GOOD! THERE'S THE **SHIP...**
NOT REALLY OUR PROBLEM... TIME TO GO!
TRICK IS...
...TO *RIDE* THE WIND...
ALL CLEAR.
AUTOPILOT'S ENGAGED.
LET'S FUCK.
WHAT? *SERIOUSLY?*
HEY! WE DID OUR BIT, GWYNN!
THEY'RE SWEEPING THE SECTOR AGAIN NOW...
...
UNBELIEVABLE.
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CARE! MYSELF ASIDE, YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF A *MISANTHROPE...*
LET'S JUST SAY - **LOVE** IS THE BEST WAY OF HONORING **LIFE...**
NO?
I'LL JUST SAY THAT **'LOVE'** IS ALL YOU EVER SEEM TO THINK ABOUT!
AND DON'T FOOL YOURSELF!
I HATE YOU TOO...
OH. CRAP!
WHAT IS IT?
MESSAGE THROUGH THE **HYPERVELDT...**
IT'S YOUR MOTHER, THE UR-QUEEN.
I HAVE TO GO...

NOT THAT I WAS ANY *LESS* 'DISTRACTED' MIND YOU…
(YOU COULD ARGUE THERE'S A REASON FOR THAT, TOO!)

I DON'T WANT YOU TO GO. I THINK YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL.
SAMHAIN.
WHAT? I DON'T GET YOU...
HALLOWEEN! AFTER YOU'VE GRADUATED!
NEXT YEAR - COME VISIT ME IN ENGLAND.
COME TO BRIGHTON ON HALLOWEEN!
YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO TRAVEL.
DO IT THEN!
YEAH, I KNOW, BUT - WHY WAIT SO LONG? WHY NOT SOONER, LIKE SPRING BREAK?
BECAUSE...
I WANT YOU TO MEET MY PARENTS.
NOT FUNNY, AMBER.
WAIT!
ON THE NIGHT OF SAMHAIN THERE'S THIS THING CALLED THE 'DUMB SUPPER', OK?
THE IDEA IS:
YOU COOK SOMETHING NICE, PUT DRINKS OUT, AND YOU LEAVE THE DOORS AND WINDOWS OPEN ALL NIGHT -
THEN YOUR DEAD RELATIVES CAN COME VISIT, AND, Y' KNOW, CATCH UP ON ALL THE GOSSIP AND STUFF...
OK.
SO NOW YOU'RE JUST CREEPING ME THE FUCK OUT...

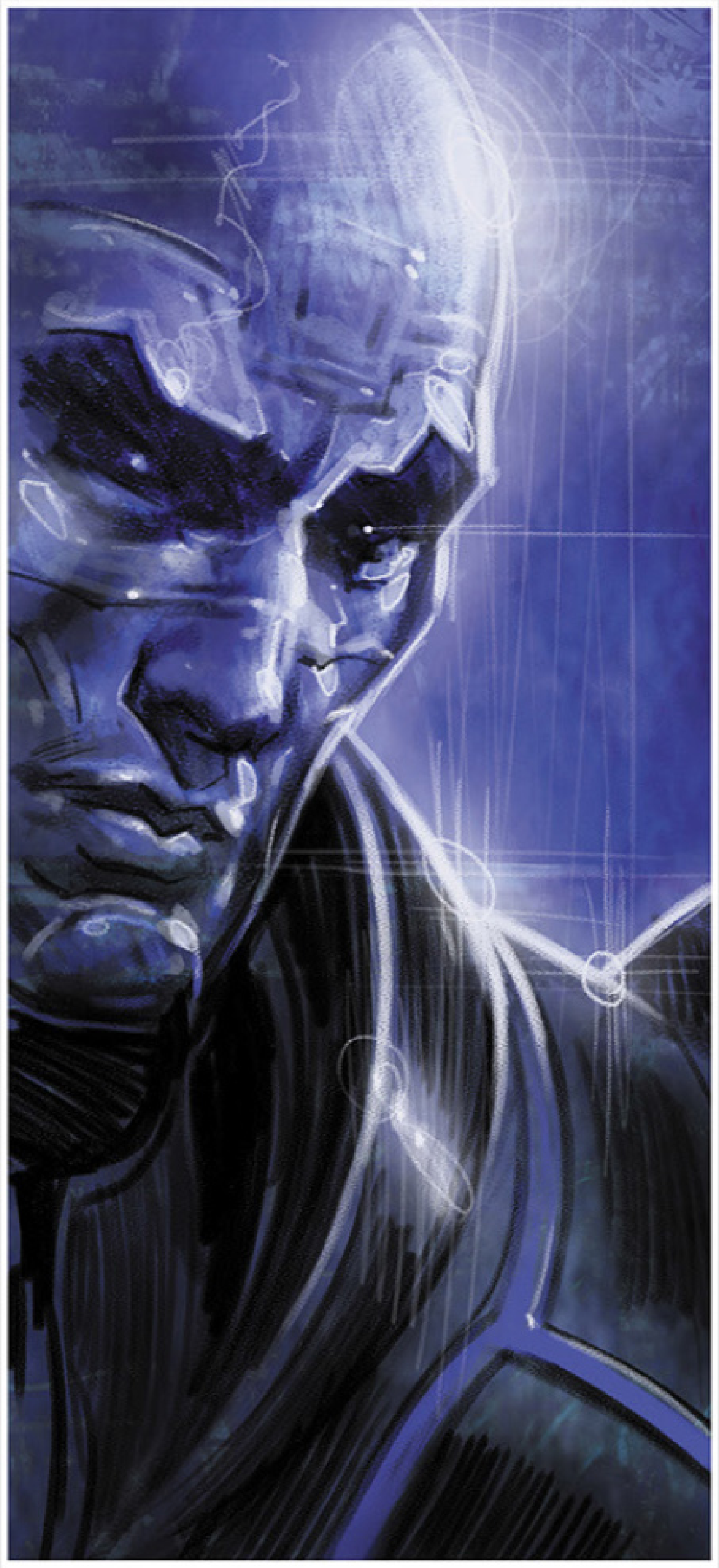
SERIOUSLY?
OH COME ON, THERE'S LIKE THE MEXICAN DAY OF THE DEAD, AND THE VOODOO DAY OF THE DEAD...
THE HAITIANS HAVE GEDE...
WHAT'S THE FUCKING DIFFERENCE?
...
OK. YOU KNOW THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT...
DON'T TAKE ME SO BLOODY SERIOUSLY!
JESUS!
I JUST THOUGHT... I JUST...
OK. FAIR ENOUGH. I GET IT. THAT WAS A FUCKED-UP THING TO SAY. SORRY...
HEY! NO! NO - I'M SORRY! IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT ME TO DO, I'M DOWN WITH THAT, OK?
YOU ARE FREAKIN' CRAZY THO! BUT HEY - I GUESS THAT'S WHAT I LIKE...
OH - THAT'S WHAT YOU LIKE, IS IT?
YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I LIKE! HA!
FUCK YOU! SHUT UP! YOU ARE SO FUCKING WEIRD!
BUT I DO...
I LOVE IT.
YOU'RE ACTUALLY PRETTY STRANGE YOURSELF, YOU KNOW?
OH YEAH? HOW SO?
HM.
HARD TO SAY...

I JUST HAVE THIS SENSE -
LIKE YOU'RE AN **OLD SOUL**...
Mount Diablo
STATE PARK
TO CONCORD
North Gate Entrance Station
Eagle Peak
Mt. Olympia
North Peak
Castle Rock
Balancing Rock
PITTSBURG
CONCORD
PLEASANT HILL
CLAYTON
WALNUT CREEK
MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK
DANVILLE

'OLD SOULS'.
WHAT OTHER KIND IS THERE?
EVEN THE **UNBORN** KIND TURN OUT TO BE ANCIENT!
SO BACK IN THE FUTURE -
IN LIGHT OF THE *FUTURE WAR* AND EVERYTHING ELSE -
WYLLT'S MUM, THE **UR-QUEEN**, HAS SOME CRAZY, IMPORTANT SHIT TO TELL HIM.
SO SHE CALLS HIM TO THE THRONE WORLD.
AND SHE SAYS SOMETHING LIKE:
WYLLT, MY SON - IT HAS BEEN TOO LONG, BUT I THOUGHT IT SAFEST TO MEET WHERE THE **CAST** CANNOT SEE.
UR-QUEEN,
ADHAN AMBROSIUS.
MOTHER!
GOOD TO SEE YOU IN THE PHYSICAL REALM FOR A CHANGE.

HOW ARE YOU?
YOU LOOK TIRED...
HOW *I* AM... IS NOT IMPORTANT, WYLLT.
AND SADLY I DON'T HAVE THE TIME FOR ANY MOTHERLY CONSIDERATIONS I MIGHT HAVE.
BUT TELL ME NOW - HOW GOES *THE WAR*, IN YOUR VIEW, CHILD?
I'M SURE MY VIEW VARIES LITTLE ENOUGH FROM YOUR OWN, MOTHER! AND YOU SEE FAR MORE THAN I DO! SO, AS YOU KNOW, IT'S **BAD** - RIGHT ACROSS UNIVERSAL SPACE-TIME...

ON THE *PHYSICAL BATTLEGROUNDS* OF THE ***TERRAVELDT*** WE'RE RESISTING - BUT WHO KNOWS FOR HOW LONG?
IN THE *THOUGHT-VORTICES* OF THE ***METAVELDT*** WE HOLD FIRM. THEY CANNOT ACCESS IT, BUT OF COURSE THEY HAVE ENLISTED SPIES WHO *CAN*, SO...
AS FOR ***HYPERVELDT*** - THE NUMBERED REALMS OF THE *SOLID-STATE INTELLIGENCES* - THEY UTTERLY DOMINATE THERE, AS THEY ALWAYS HAVE. THEY ARE *MACHINE MINDS* AFTER ALL. THEY'RE NATIVE TO IT.
AND STILL THERE IS NO SIGN OF YOUR PROMISED *KNIGHTS*...
I HAVE RUN SYSTEM-WIDE ANALYSES IN SEARCH OF A FLAW IN MY PREDICTIONS - SOMETHING THAT MIGHT PROVE MY MAPPING *WRONG*... BUT NO MATTER HOW I RUN THEM, WITHOUT THE ***KNIGHTS*** THE FUTURE LIES ALWAYS IN *TATTERS*...
...AND EVERYTHING IS LOST TO THE ***CAST***, AND *ENTROPY*, AND THE WHITE-HUM MATTER-DEATH OF *ABSOLUTE OBLIVION*...



THESE...

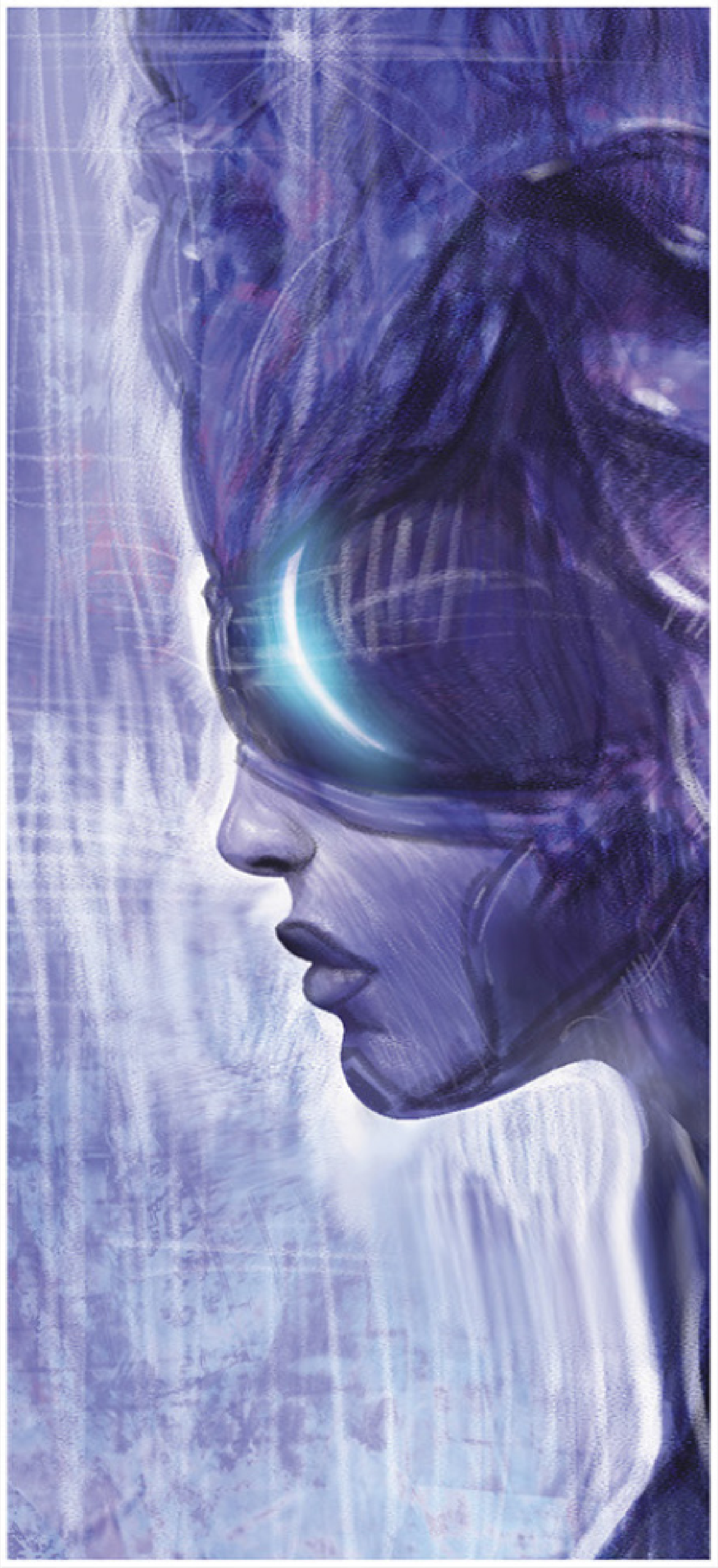
KNIGHTS...

NO ONE CAN REMEMBER THEM, MOTHER!

*HOW **CAN** THEY HAVE EXISTED?*

*YOU TALK OF **MAGIC** -*

*AS IF IT WAS A **REAL** THING!*



AND SO IT ***WAS.***

AND ***IS.***

AND IT STILL LIVES *INSIDE YOU*, MY SON -

THOUGH DORMANT...

I LEFT A HIDDEN ENCRYPTED MESSAGE TO MYSELF IN THE ***METAVELDT***, WYLLT -

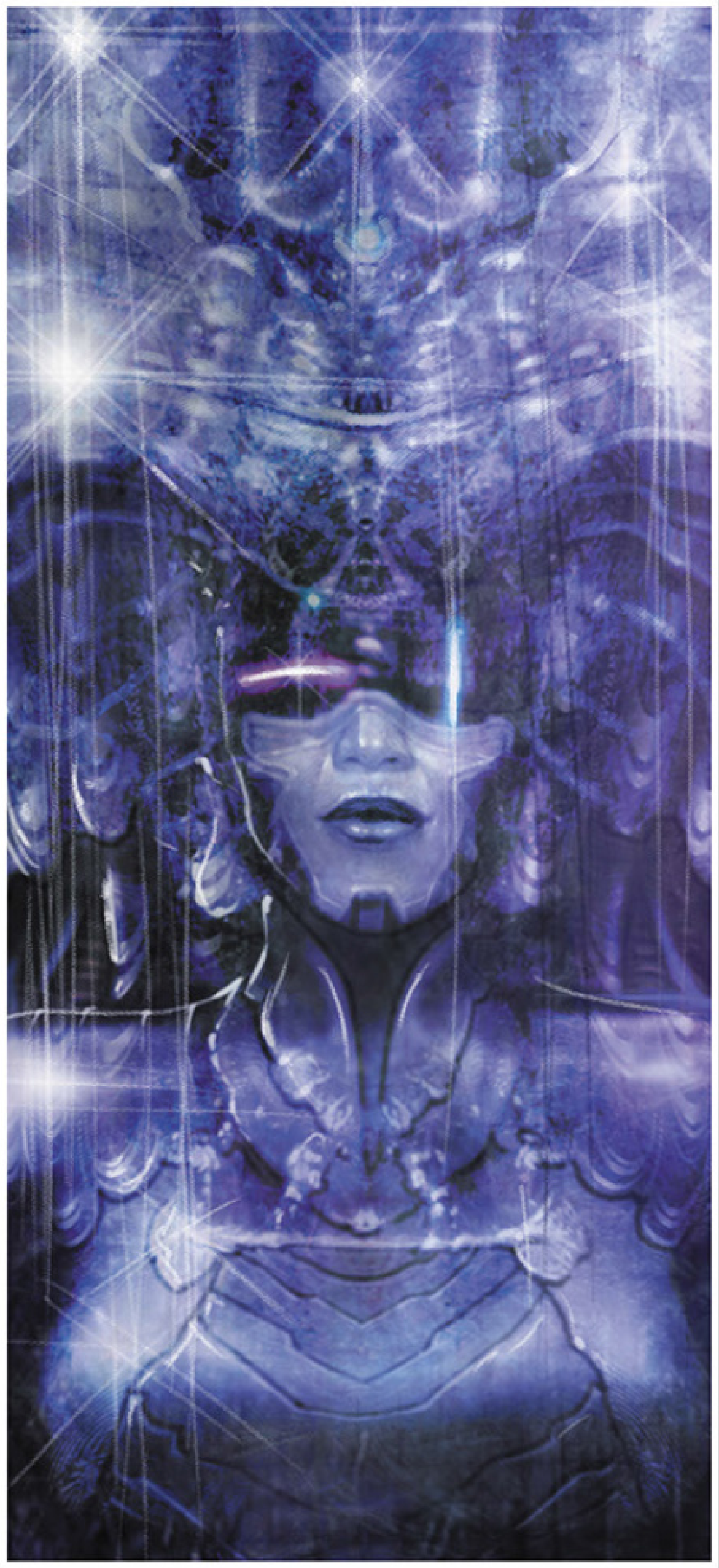
SET TO *ALERT* ME SHOULD WE EVER COME TO THIS.

SHOULD ***MAGIC*** BE SEEN TO *VANISH*,

AND SHOULD WE START TO FORGET IT, AS TIME -

AND OUR CIRCUMSTANCES -

ARE CHANGED...

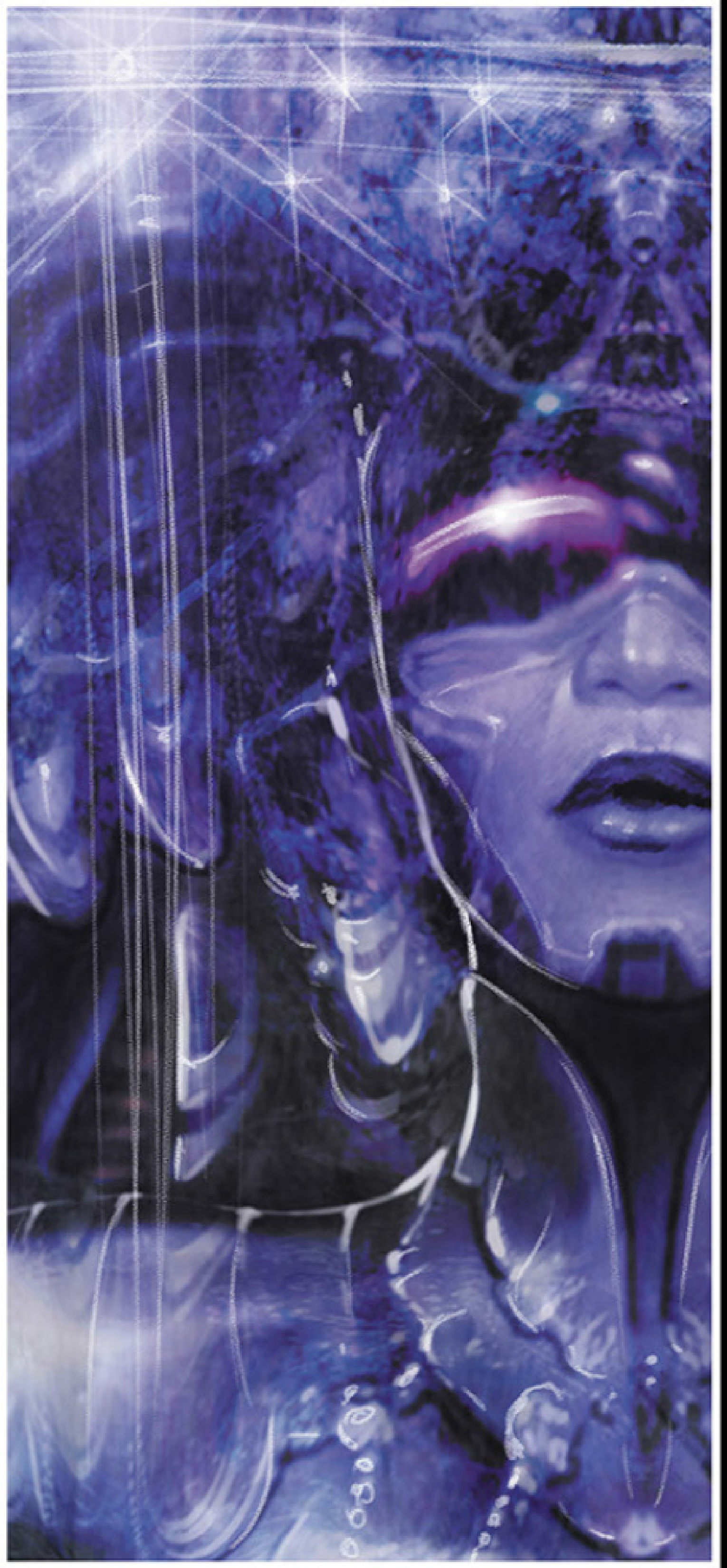


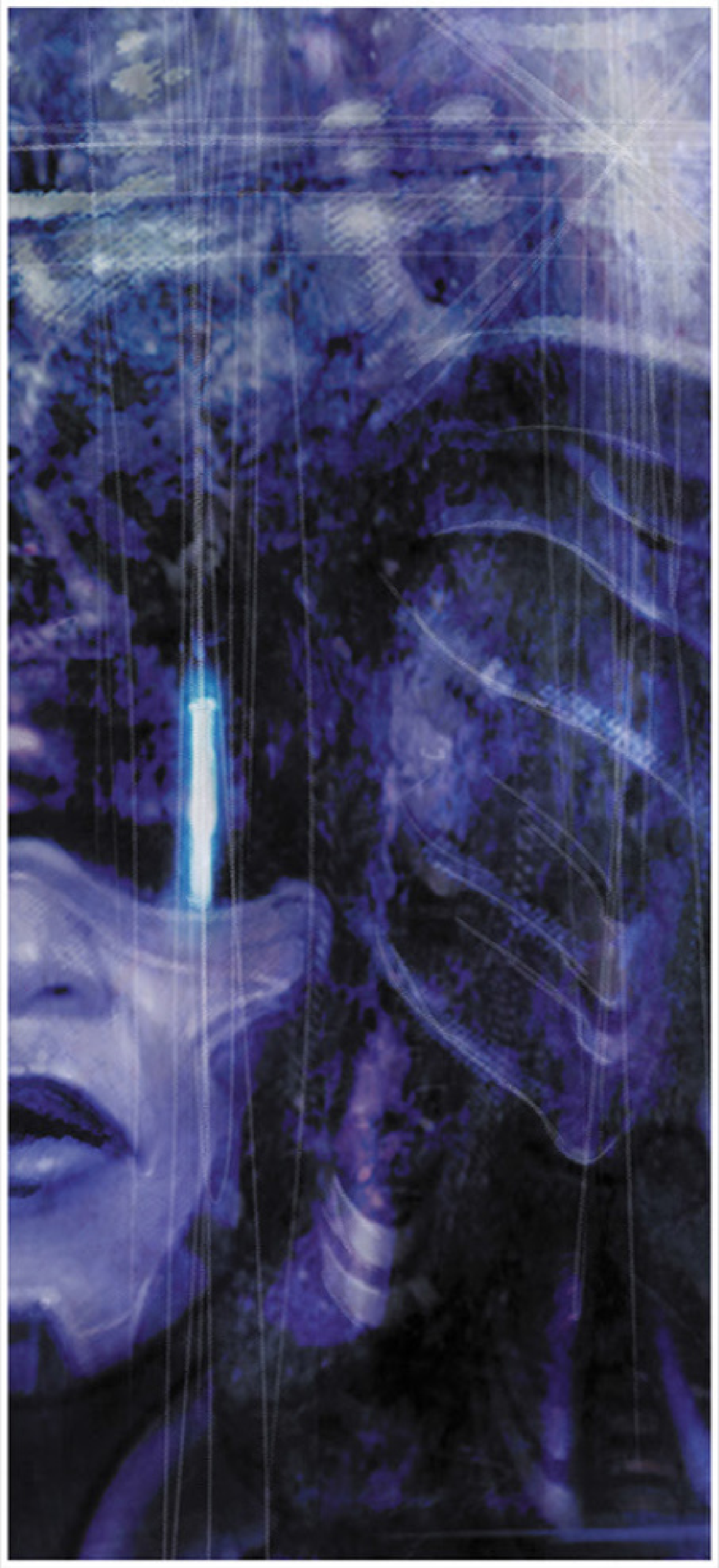
YOU, CHILD, ARE ***SHAPE-CARKED*** TO BE AMONGST OUR ***FINEST WARRIORS.***

ABLE TO *CHANGE*, AND *ADAPT*, TO SURVIVE THE MOST *GRIEVOUS WOUNDING.*

BUT *OTHER THINGS* TOO...

YOU CARRY WITHIN YOU THE POTENTIAL FOR *GREATNESS*, AND THE VESTIGES OF ANOTHER, ANCIENT LINEAGE.

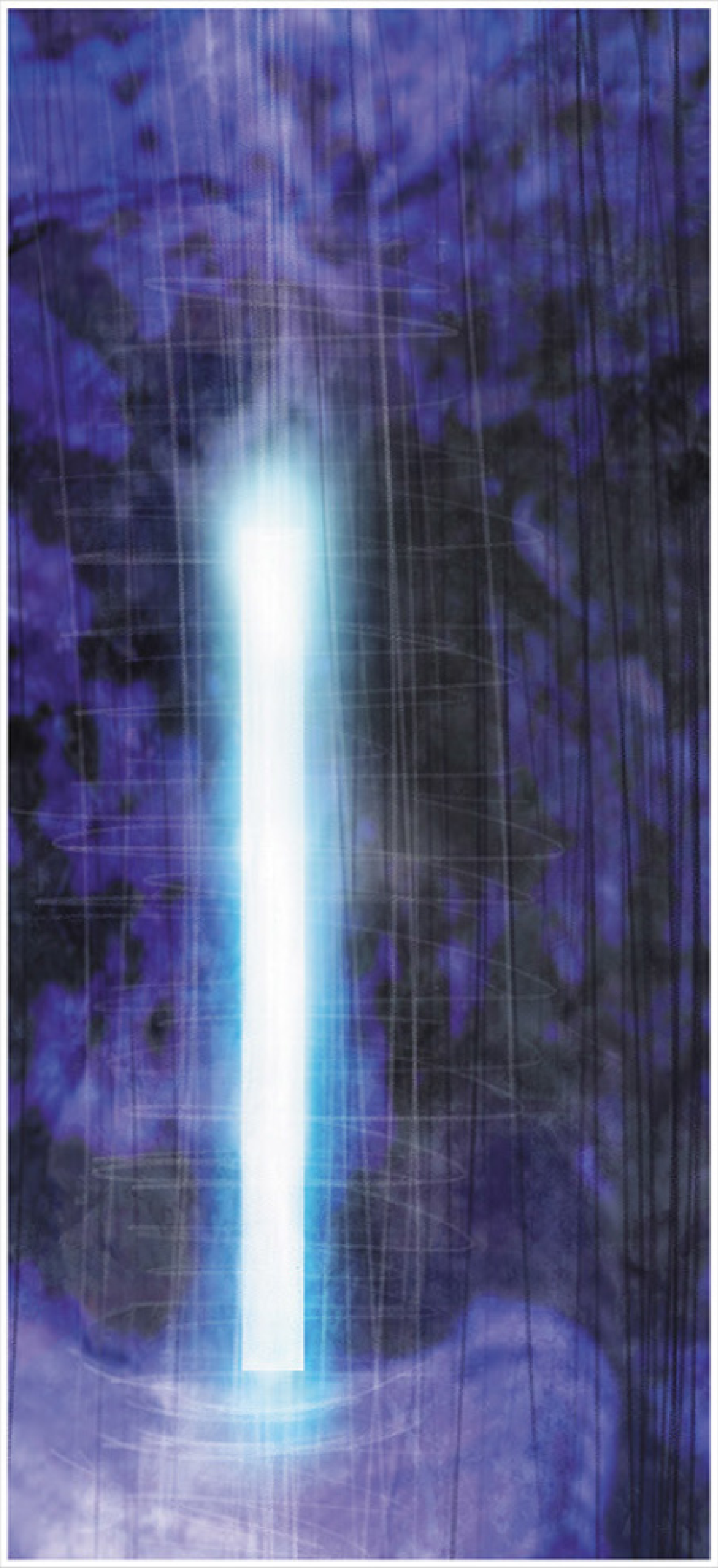




I AM CONVINCED OUR ***NOW*** HAS BEEN *COMPROMISED* -

REWRITTEN BY THE ***CAST***, AND THEIR WARRIORS -

THE ***MOR-DREADNAUGHTS.***



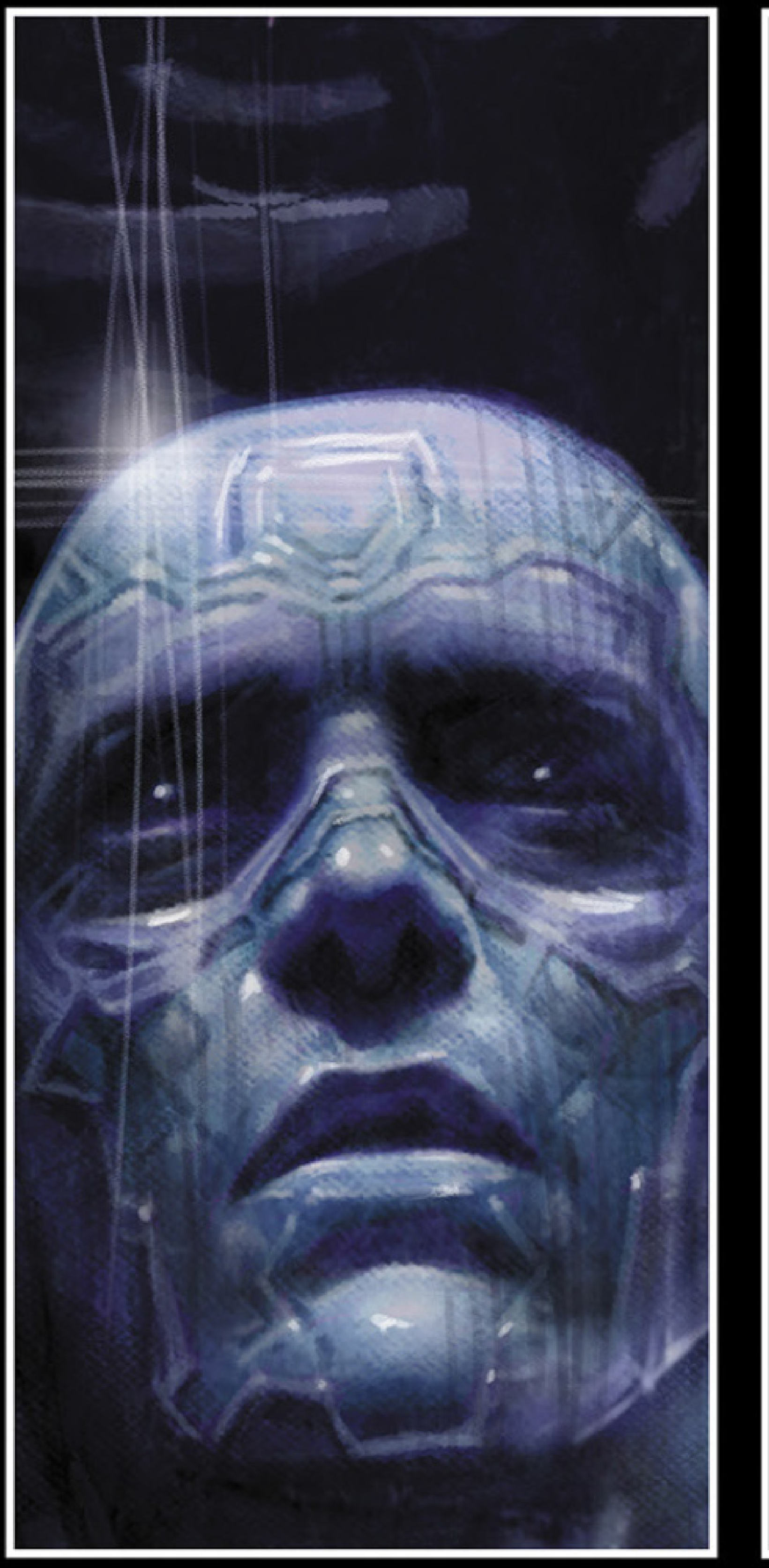
WHAT WE CURRENTLY EXIST WITHIN IS A ***CHRONATIC-STUB*** -

A DEAD-END IN TIME.

WE'VE BEEN *ROBBED* OF OUR FUTURES.

YOU OFFER US A LAST HOPE.

I'M SENDING YOU BACK TO ***EARTH***, WYLLT...

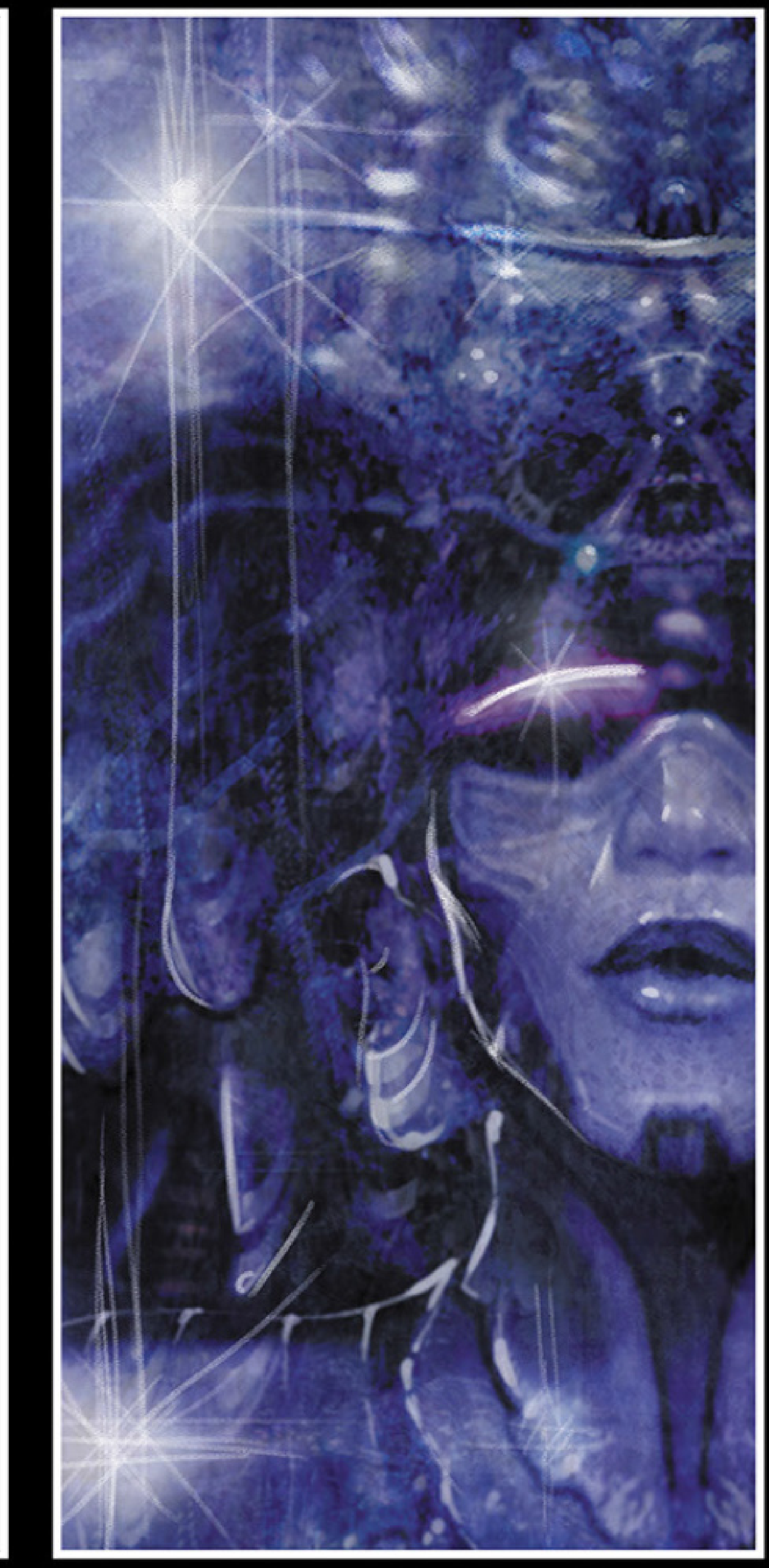


...

WHAT?

WHY?

THE EARTH'S JUST A BARREN ROCK...



NOW IT IS. YES.

THAT'S TRUE.

WHICH IS WHY I REQUESTED THAT ***GWYNN AP CEIDIO*** BE ENGINEERED AS A ***MER-SEEK*** -

SO SHE MIGHT VENTURE BACK THROUGH TIME TO WHEN IT WAS NOT.

AND THOUGH SHE CONSENTED,

SHE HAS NOT RETURNED

AND I HAVE HEARD NOTHING.

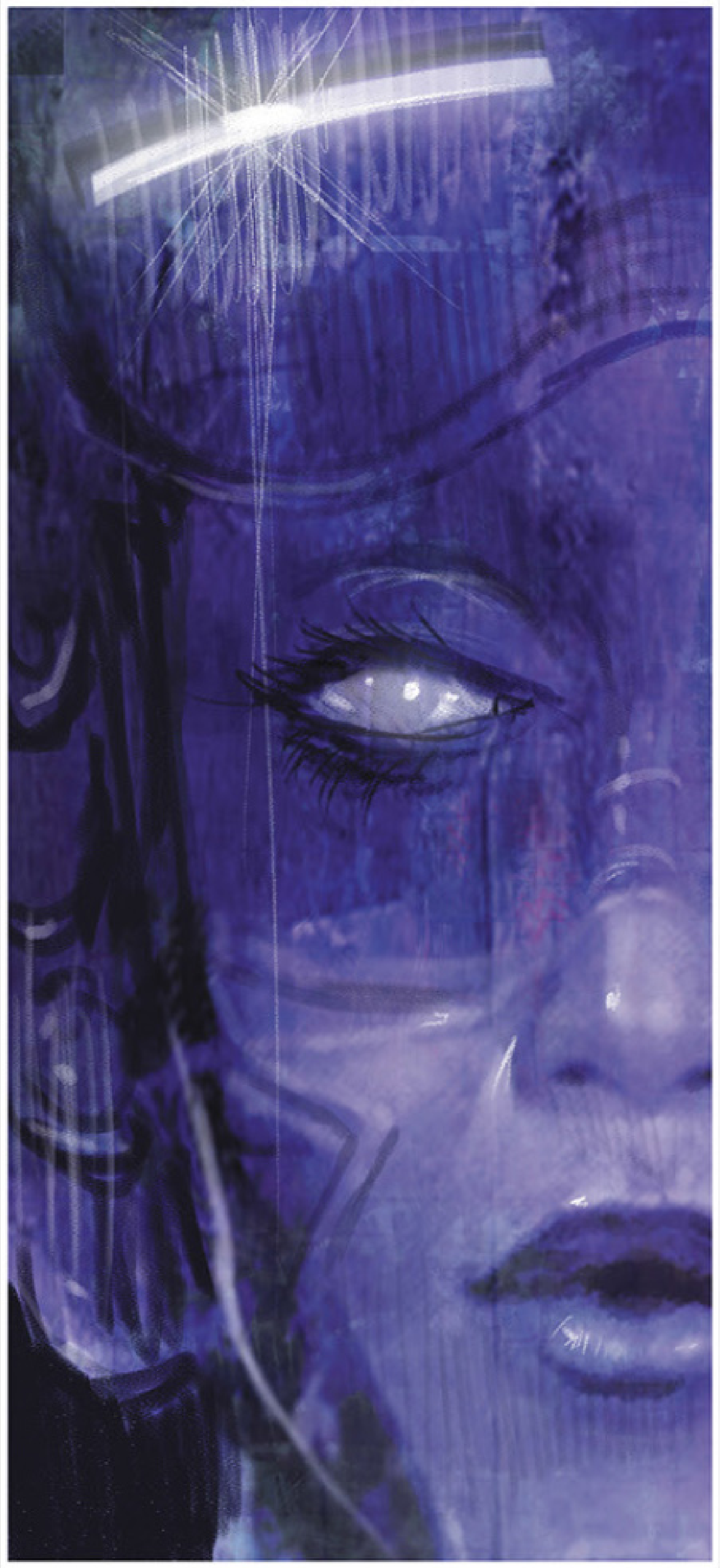
CHILD, I FEAR SHE,

AND THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE,

MAY BE LOST TO US.

I AM SORRY.

I KNOW YOU WERE CLOSE...

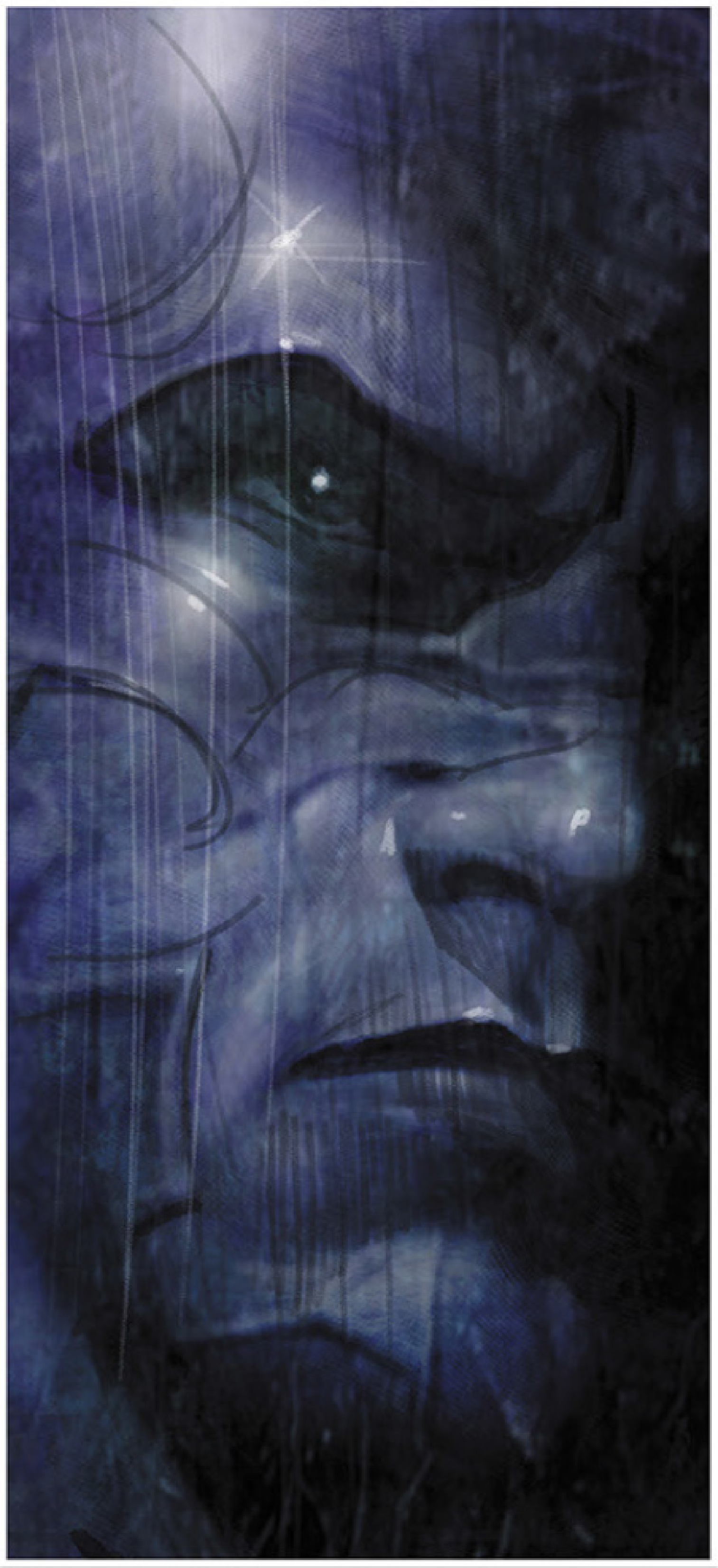


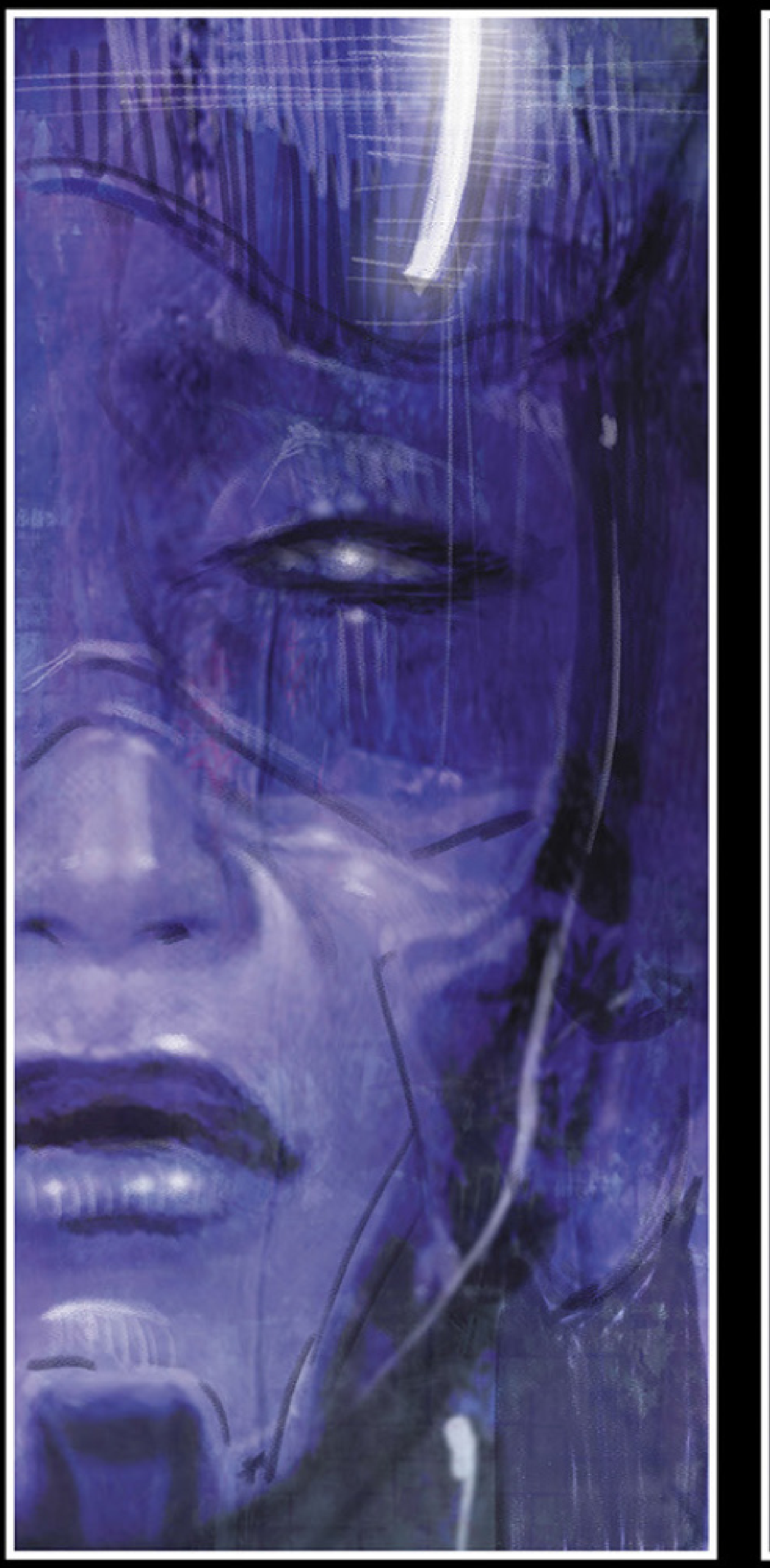
CLOSE ENOUGH.

I SUPPOSE.

WHY HER?

AND NOT ME?





THERE HAVE BEEN...

MANY.

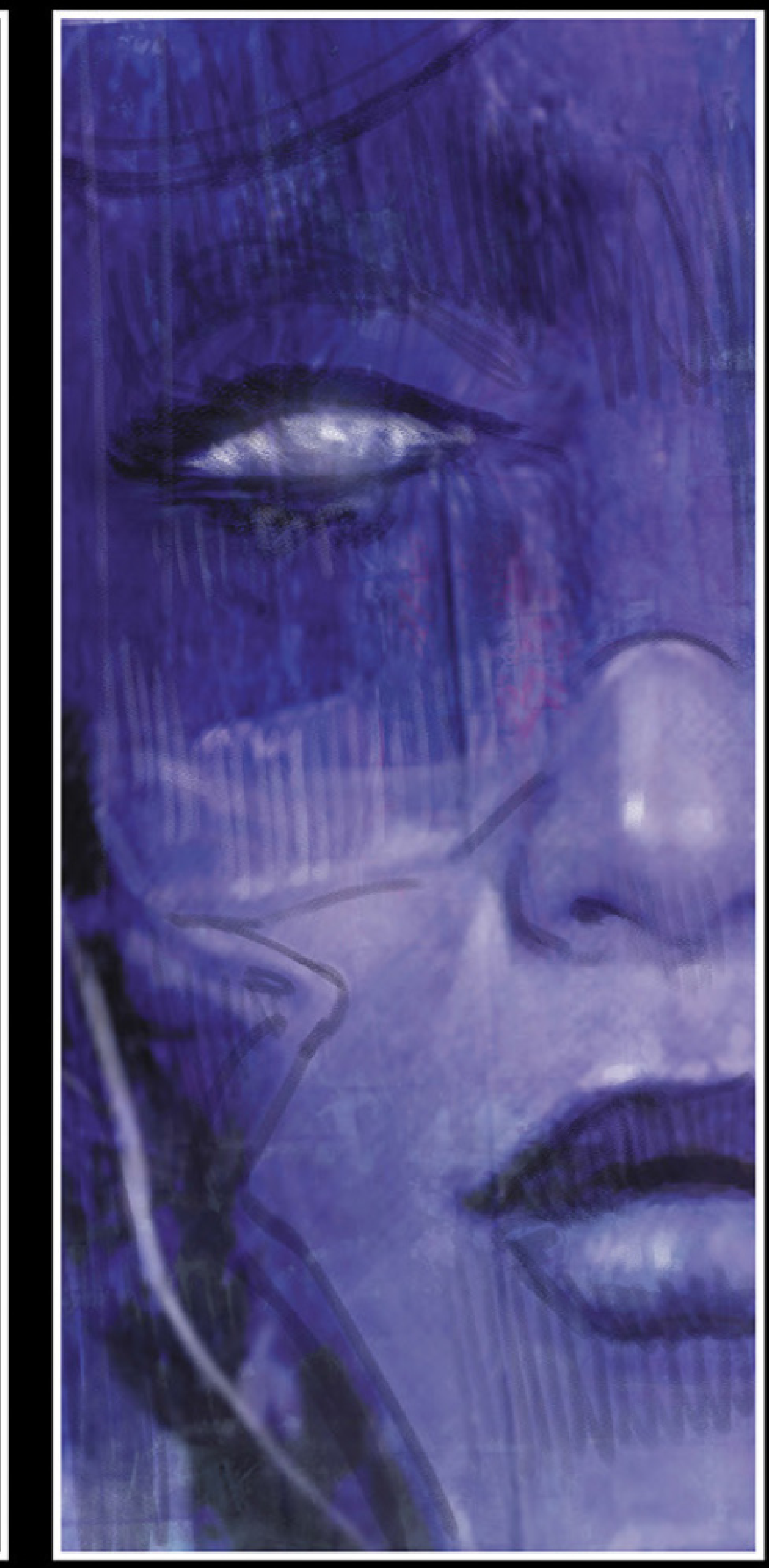
AND YOU'RE MY SON, WYLLT!

MY LAST SURVIVING CHILD!

I DON'T SEEK YOUR FORGIVENESS -

BUT THAT MUCH YOU MUST UNDERSTAND.

I AM STILL, AFTER ALL, A MOTHER.



BUT WE HAVE TO TRY.

WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

I NEED ANOTHER AGENT - FEET ON THE GROUND, IN THE MANNER OF MYTHIC HUMANKIND.

AND I NEED YOU TO GO, WYLLT, THOUGH IT BREAKS MY HEART.

BECAUSE OF WHO YOU ARE.

BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU CAN, AND MUST, DO.

I NEED A ***'MER'***,

TO SWIM IN THE TIDES OF TIME.

AND A ***'LIN'***,

TO CEASE THE ASSAULT ON THE FILIGREE OF ORDER -

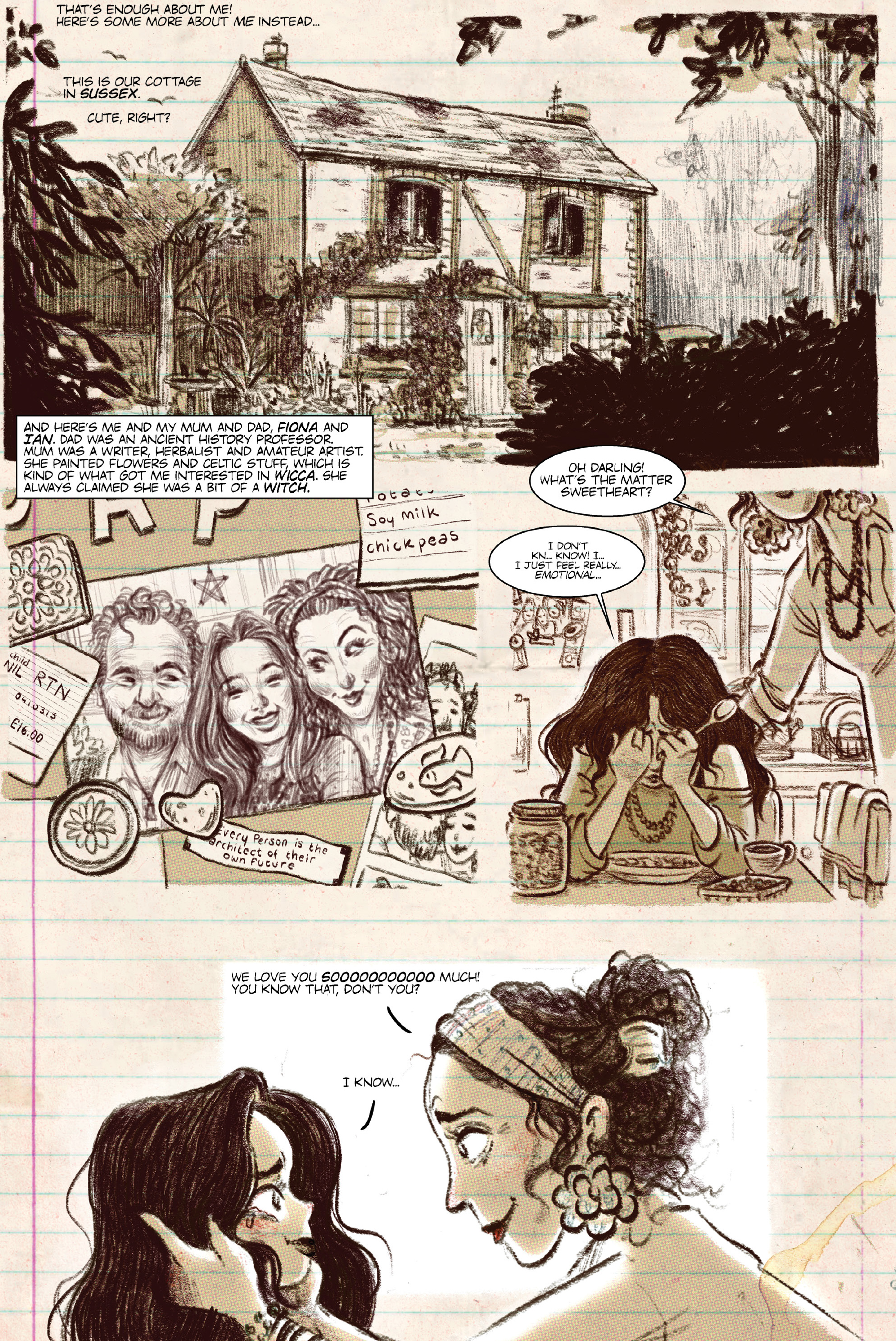
WHICH WE WEBBED SO DILIGENTLY THROUGH ALL THE UNFORGIVING CHAOS!

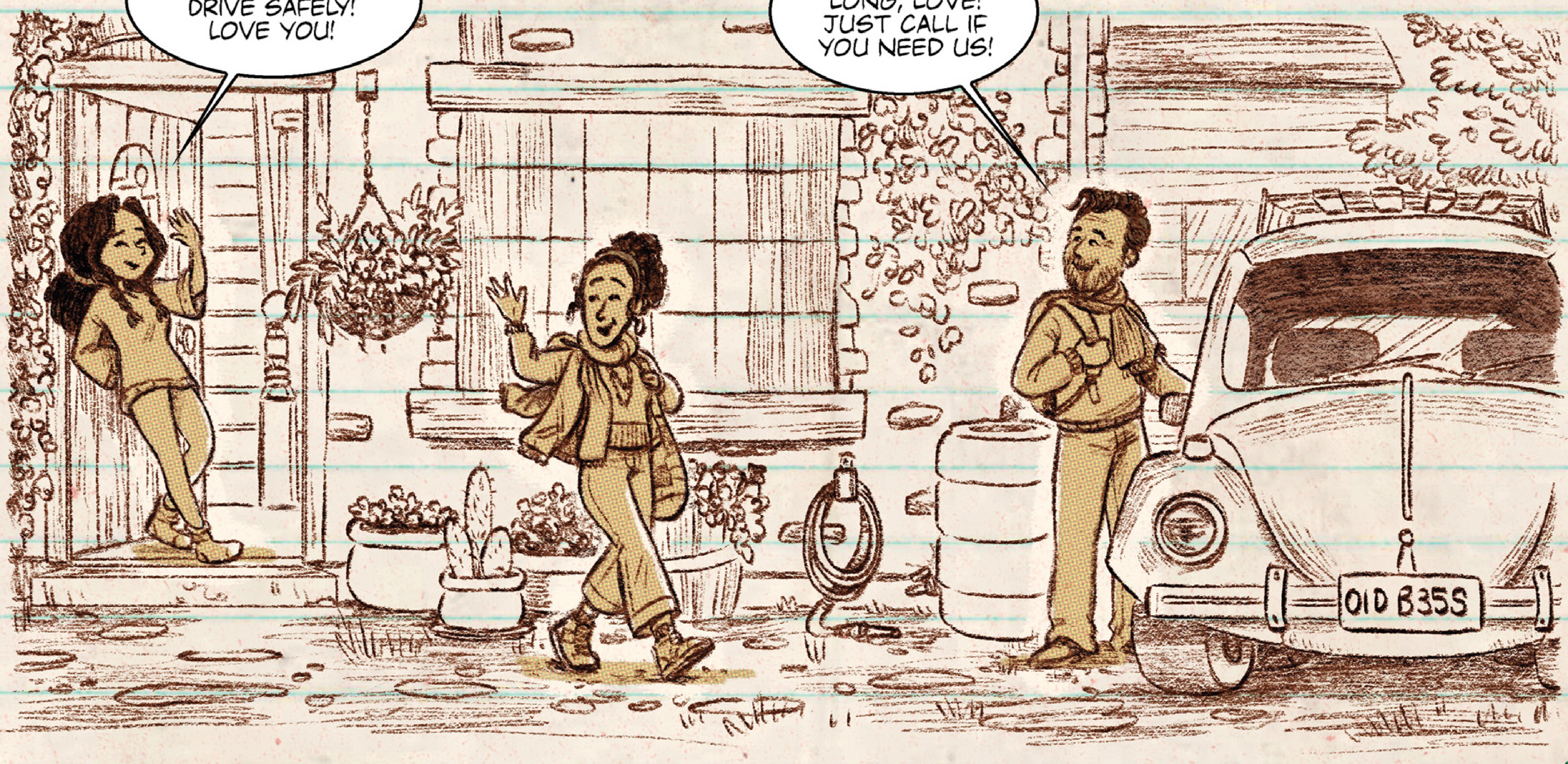
SO THAT'S HOW IT WAS...
...AND IS...
...AND NEVER WAS...
...AND ALWAYS SHALL BE.
A WAR...
...ACROSS TIME.
A MISSION TO RESTORE *MAGIC* TO THE FUTURE...
...A QUEST TO FIND OUT WHERE THE MAGIC HAD GONE -
- AND HOW, AND WHY...
...ACROSS THREE AGES...
...AND MORE.

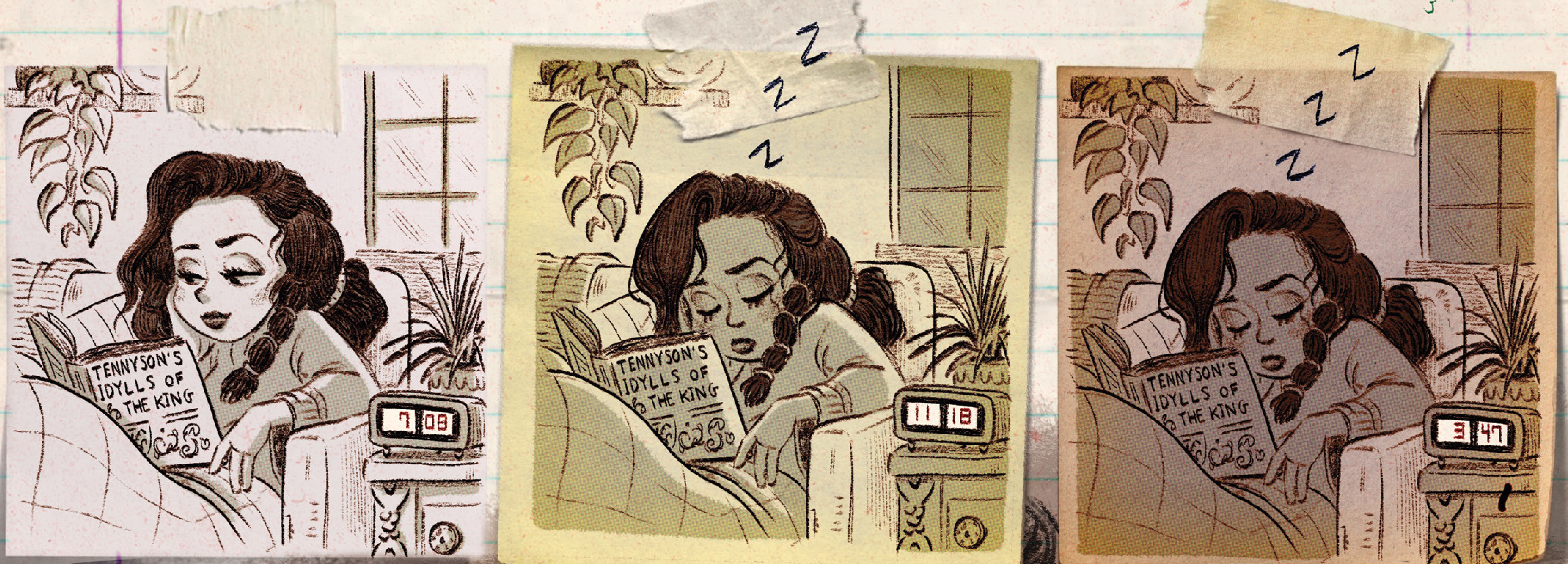
LLUDD'S BEARD! CAN IT BE?
CAN YOU SPEAK? WHO ARE YOU, CHILD?
M... muh...
Mer... Lin...

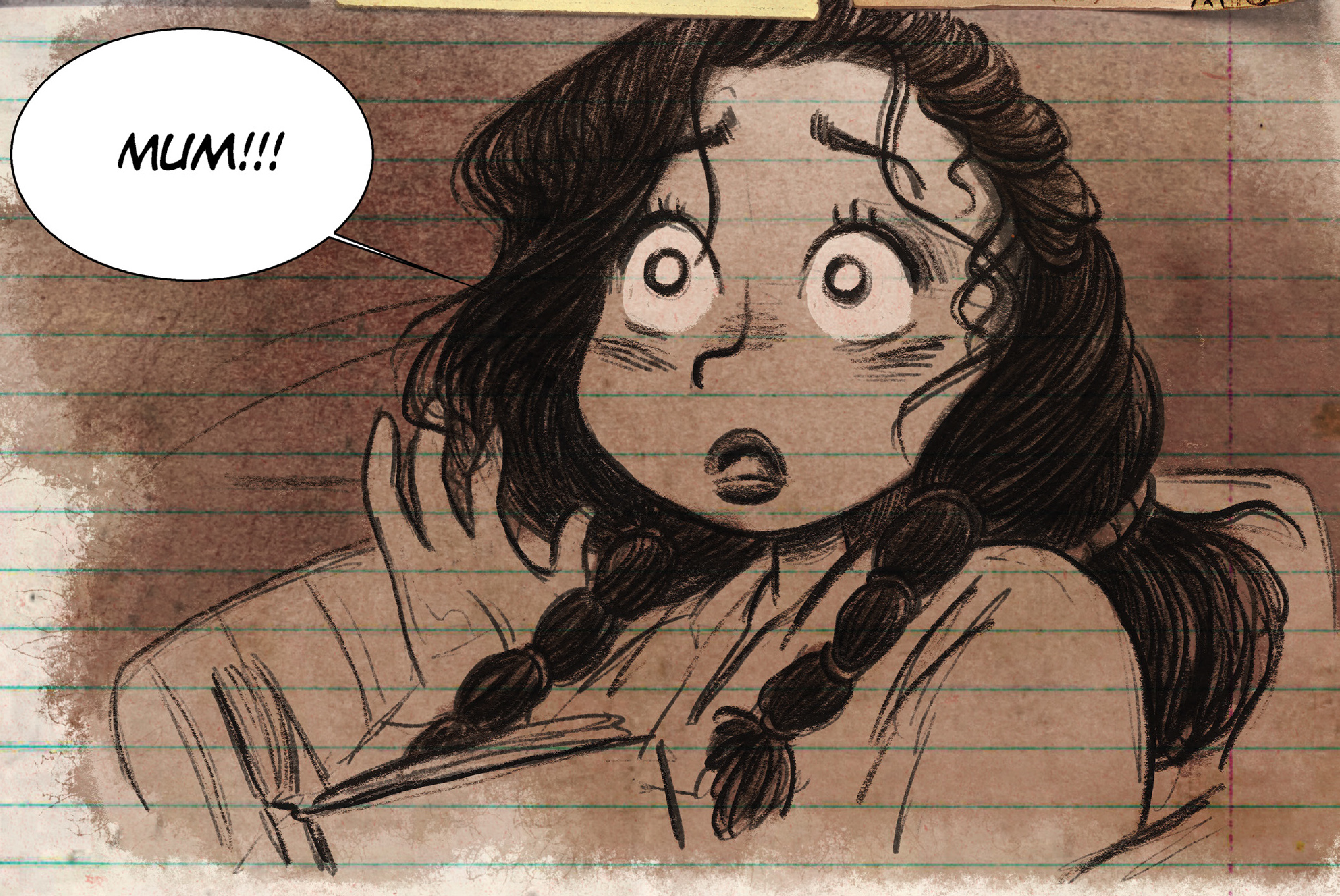
MY BIT IN ALL OF THIS WENT DOWN *PRECISELY* AS I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU. (AND I KNOW THIS IS THE GOD'S HONEST TRUTH, BECAUSE FUNNILY ENOUGH - I WAS THERE!)
WELL. SHIT!

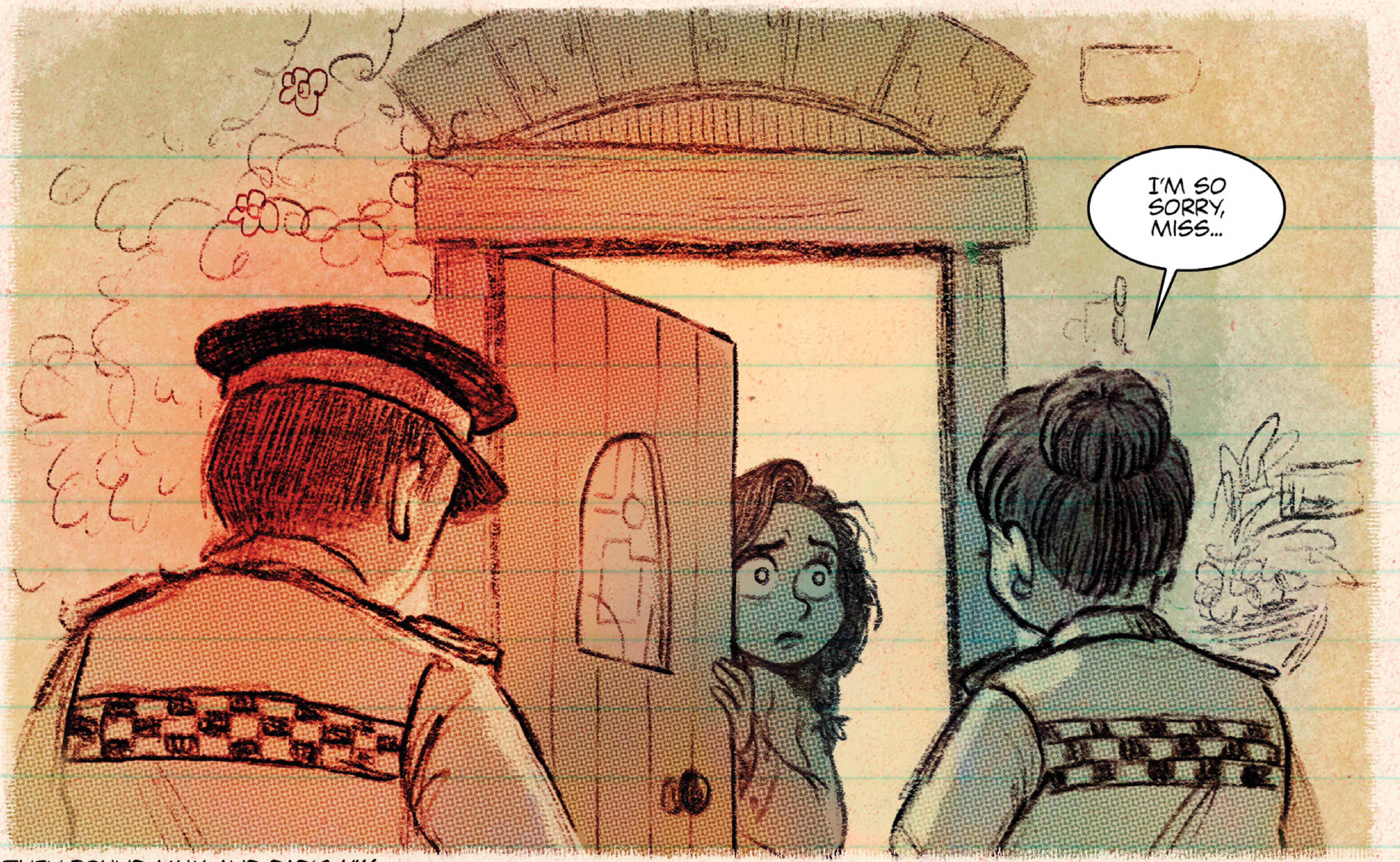
Oops!!
UHM.
I CAN EXPLAIN...
PLAN OF BRIGHTON
OH MY GOD...
DARYL?!!?
Duke's
AMBER WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK?
WAIT!


THAT'S ENOUGH ABOUT ME!
HERE'S SOME MORE ABOUT *ME* INSTEAD...
THIS IS OUR COTTAGE IN ***SUSSEX***.
CUTE, RIGHT?
AND HERE'S ME AND MY MUM AND DAD, ***FIONA*** AND ***IAN***. DAD WAS AN ANCIENT HISTORY PROFESSOR. MUM WAS A WRITER, HERBALIST AND AMATEUR ARTIST. SHE PAINTED FLOWERS AND CELTIC STUFF, WHICH IS KIND OF WHAT GOT ME INTERESTED IN ***WICCA***. SHE ALWAYS CLAIMED SHE WAS A BIT OF A ***WITCH***.
Soy milk
chickpeas
child
NIL RTN
0410315
£16.00
Every Person is the architect of their own future
OH DARLING! WHAT'S THE MATTER SWEETHEART?
I DON'T KN... KNOW! I... I JUST FEEL REALLY... EMOTIONAL...
WE LOVE YOU ***SOOOOOOOOOOO*** MUCH! YOU KNOW THAT, DON'T YOU?
I KNOW...


BYE MUM! BYE DAD! DRIVE SAFELY! LOVE YOU!
WE SHAN'T BE LONG, LOVE! JUST CALL IF YOU NEED US!
OID B35S


TENNYSON'S IDYLLS OF THE KING
7:08
Z Z Z
11:18
Z Z Z
3:47


MUM!!!


I'M SO SORRY, MISS...

THEY FOUND MUM AND DAD'S ***VW*** JUST OUTSIDE OF ***BRIGHTON***.

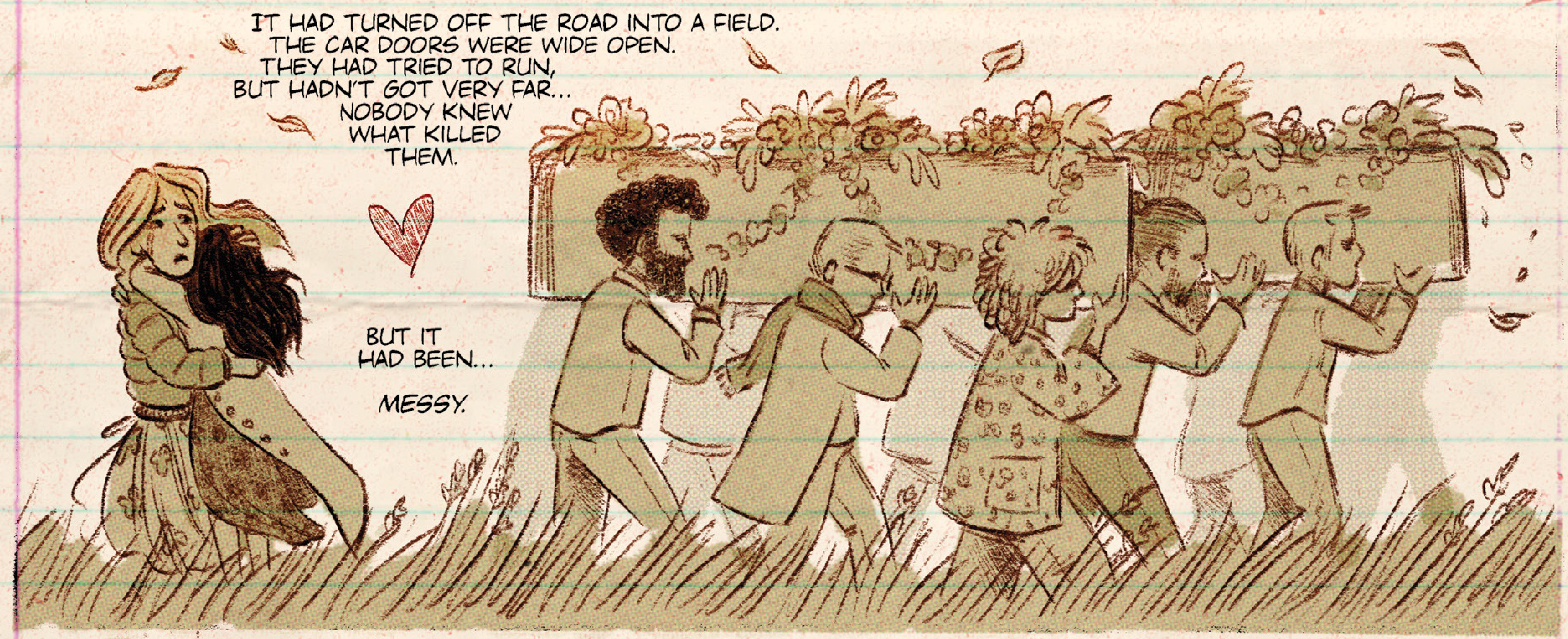
ᚢ strength

ᛟ separation

ᚱ journey

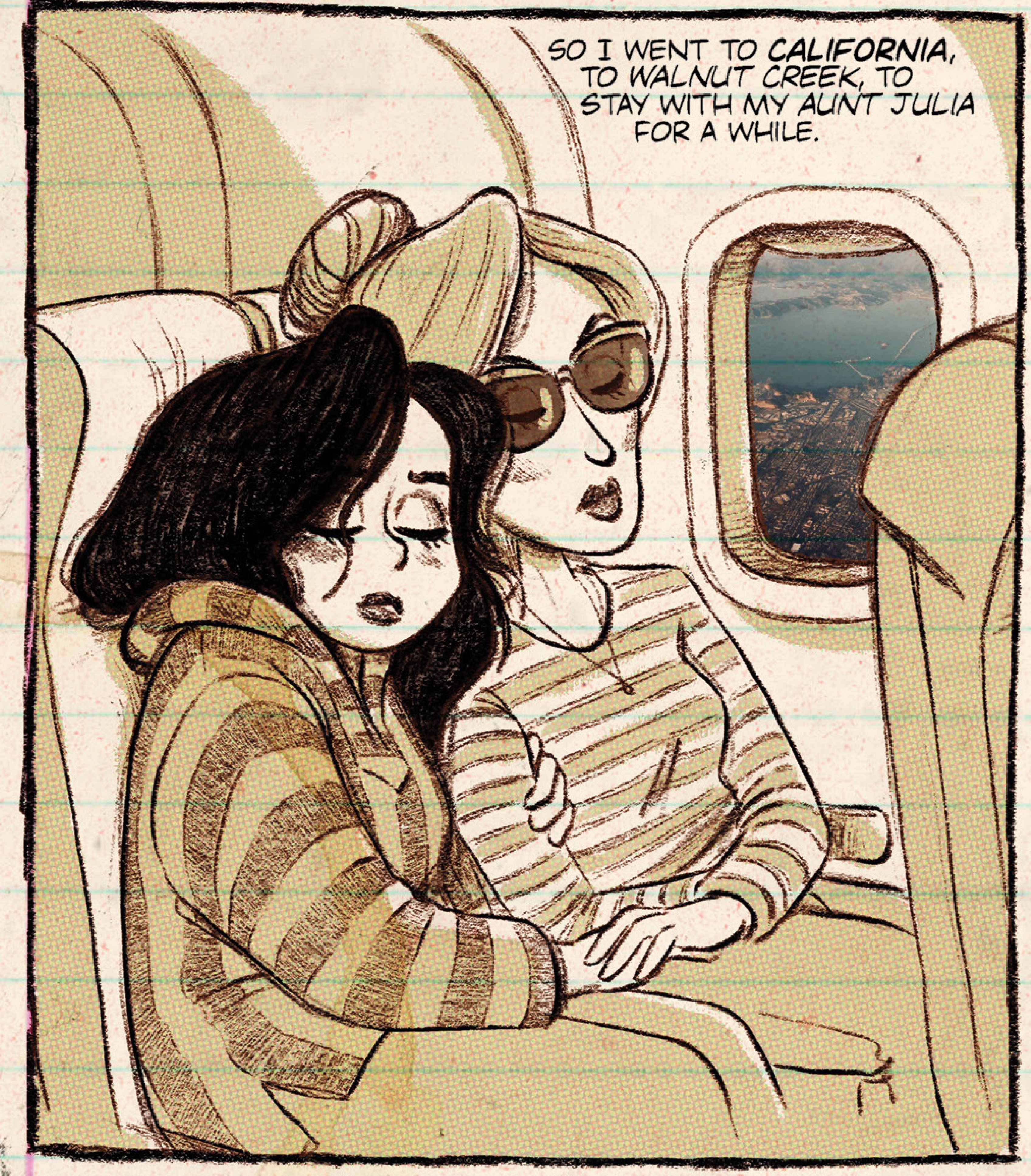
ᚺ disruption

unknowable

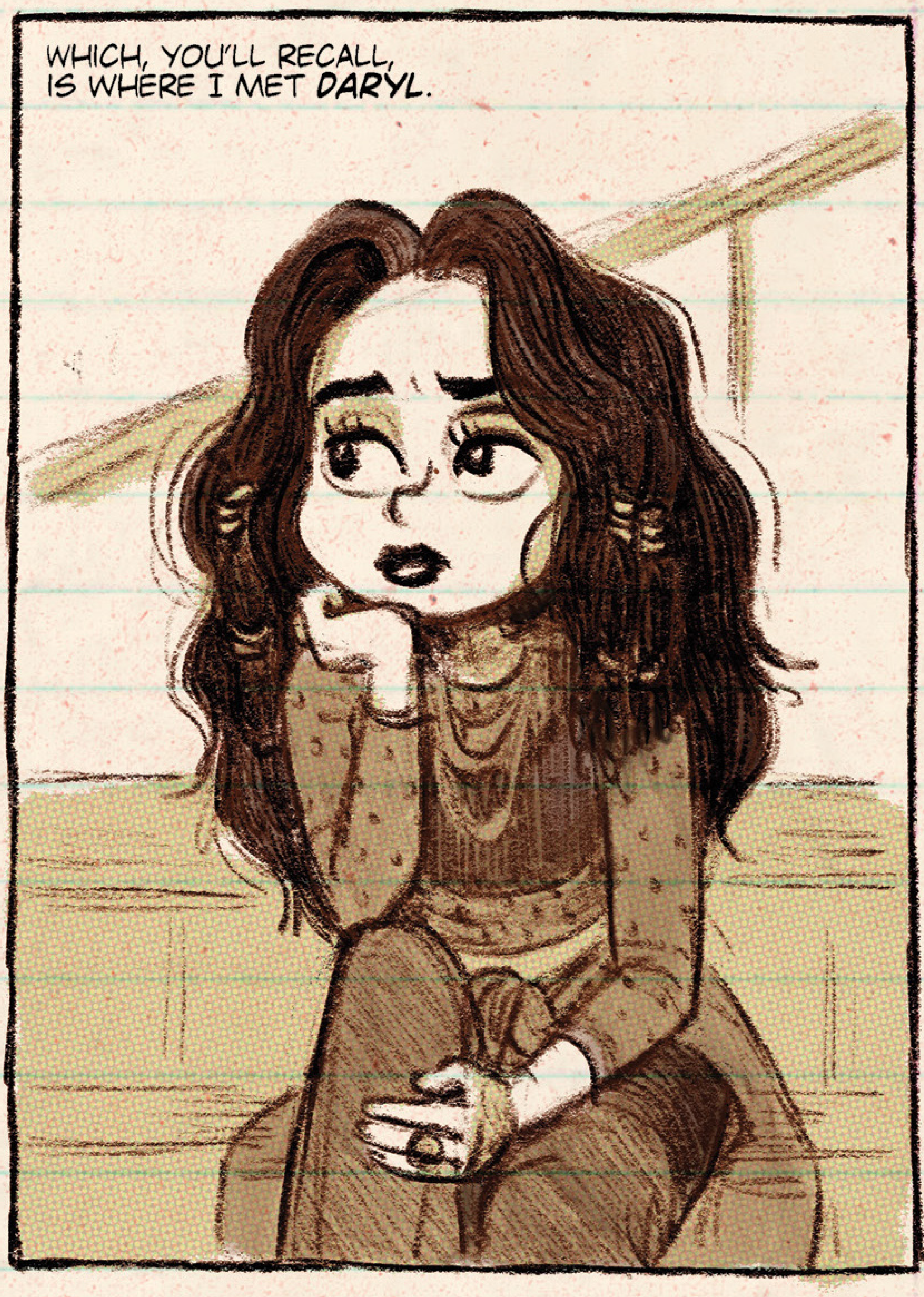


IT HAD TURNED OFF THE ROAD INTO A FIELD. THE CAR DOORS WERE WIDE OPEN. THEY HAD TRIED TO RUN, BUT HADN'T GOT VERY FAR... NOBODY KNEW WHAT KILLED THEM.

BUT IT HAD BEEN... *MESSY.*



SO I WENT TO ***CALIFORNIA***, TO *WALNUT CREEK*, TO STAY WITH MY *AUNT JULIA* FOR A WHILE.



WHICH, YOU'LL RECALL, IS WHERE I MET ***DARYL***.

ᚷ Partnersh

ᛗ the self

DARYL...
I'M SORRY.
YOU DID SAY TO COME ON HALLOWEEN...
YES!
THAT WAS MEANT TO BE LAST YEAR...
ONLY, YOU NEVER CAME...
YOU'RE RIGHT.
AND... THERE'S REASONS...
BUT I SHOULDN'T HAVE JUST SHOWN UP LIKE THIS...
BRIGHTON SQUARE
NO YOU BLOODY SHOULDN'T! JESUS!
SO, AH...
...WAS THAT YOUR GIRLFRIEND?
NO.
YES.
I DON'T KNOW.
MAYBE?
PROBABLY NOT ANY MORE THOUGH...
HEY LOOK, JUST GO BACK TO HER, OK?
IT'S ALL GOOD. SERIOUSLY.

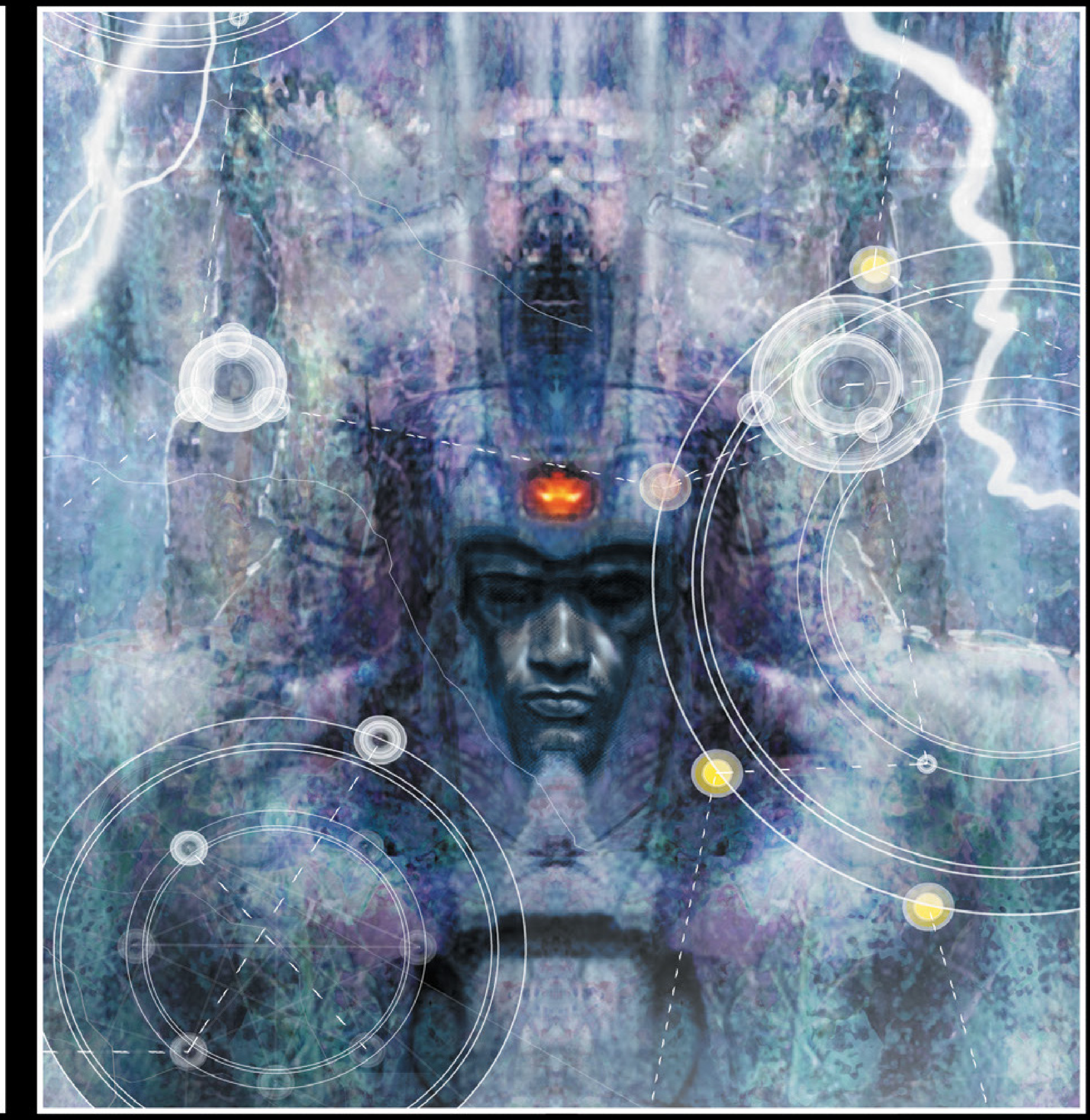
PLANS.

BEST NOT TO MAKE THEM. THEY *NEVER* WORK OUT!

SPEAKING OF -

YOU'LL RECALL OLD ***MERLIN*** WAS SENT INTO THE PAST BY THE ***UR-QUEEN*** TO SAVE *MAGIC,* AND BRING ABOUT THE RETURN OF THE ***KNIGHTS OF THE VELDT***?

SO, ALL *THAT* CRAZINESS ACTUALLY STARTED PRETTY WELL...



HE SURVIVES THE JOURNEY.

FINDS HIMSELF IN *FIFTH-CENTURY BRITAIN.*

BURIES ALL HIS WILD FUTURE TECH STUFF

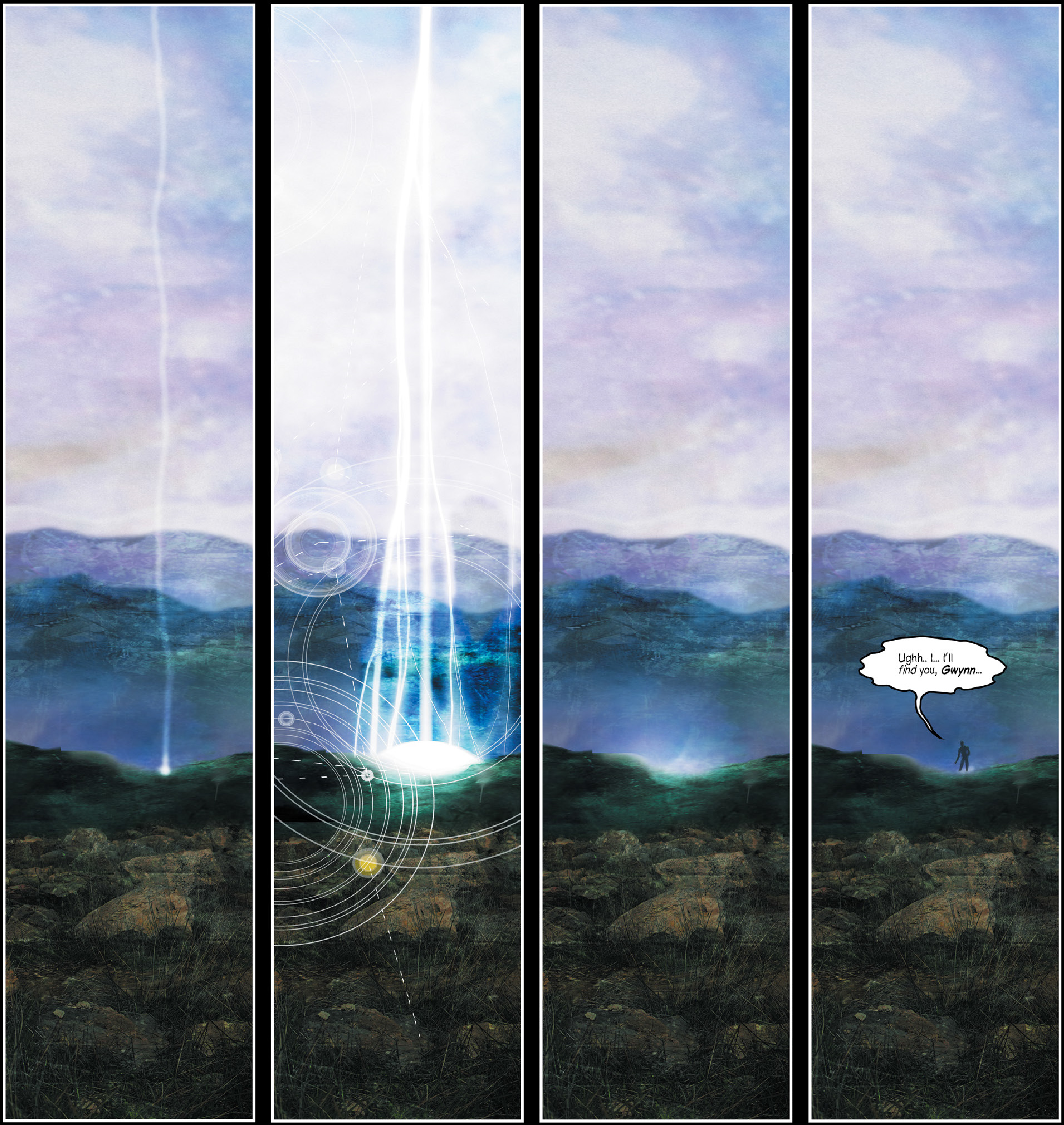
(LIGHTSABRE, SONIC SCREW-DRIVER, THE USUAL!)

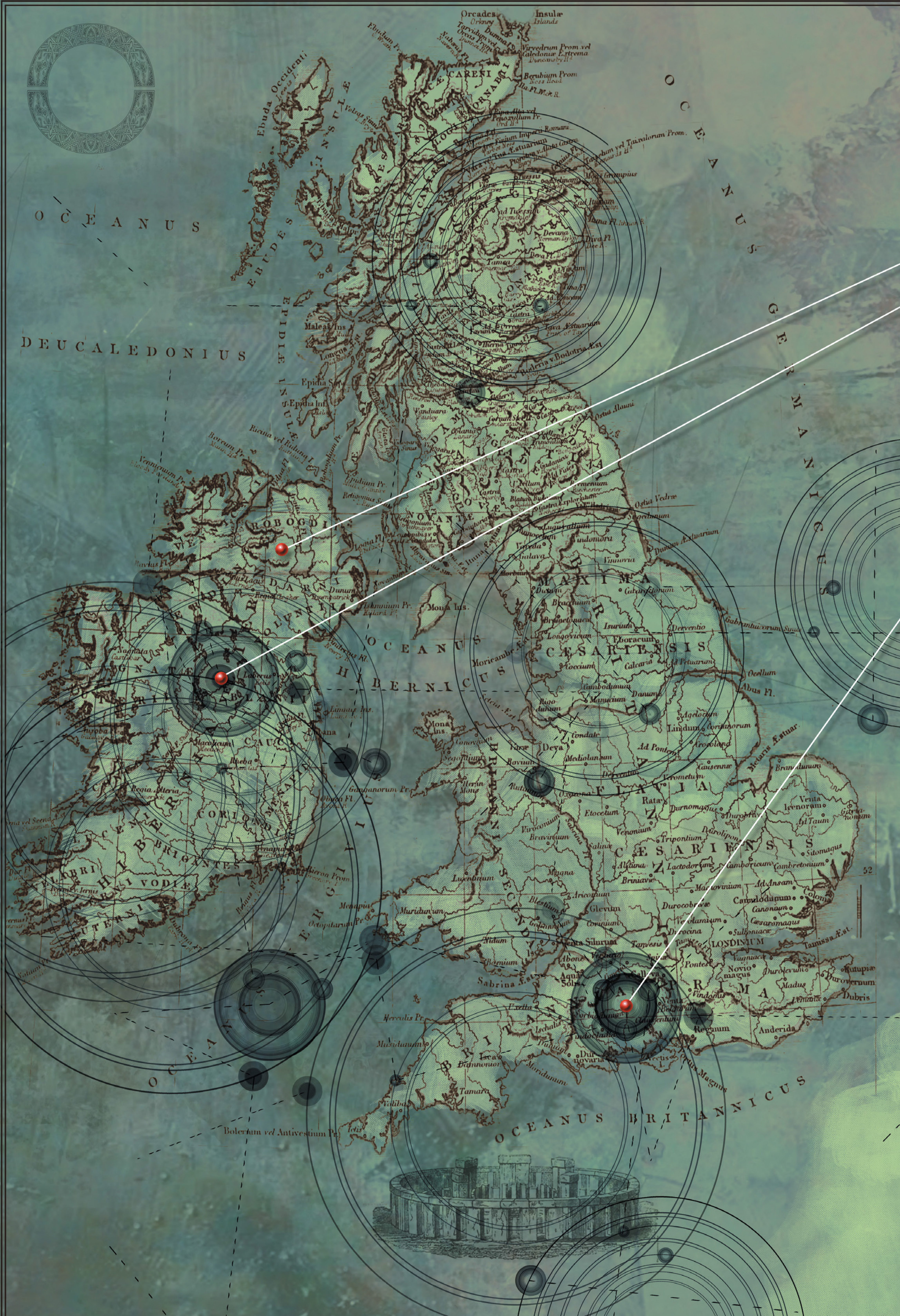
THEN HE SETS ABOUT TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HE CAN ACTUALLY DO TO GET THINGS GOING...

AND HERE'S WHERE YOU CAN REFER TO YOUR TRUSTY COPY OF GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH'S ***HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN,*** BECAUSE HERE'S WHERE MERLIN SHOWS UP IN IT -

AND, ACCORDING TO MERLIN, OLD GEOFFA WAS PRETTY ON THE MONEY, FOR A WHILE AT LEAST!

IT BASICALLY GOES ALONG THESE LINES...


Ughh.. I... I'll *find* you, **Gwynn**...


OCEANUS
DEUCALEDONIUS
OCEANUS GERMANICUS
OCEANUS HIBERNICUS
OCEANUS BRITANNICUS
Orcades
MAXIMA CESARIENSIS
FLAVIA CESARIENSIS
LONDINIUM

THIS IS YOUR BASIC ***FIFTH-CENTURY BRITAIN***.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO KNOW -

IRELAND IS CALLED ***HIBERNIA.***

SOMEWHERE NEAR THE MIDDLE IS THE ***HILL OF UISNEACH,*** WHICH WAS AT THE TIME CALLED ***MOUNT KILLARAUS.***

IN ***FRANCE*** THERE IS AN AREA CALLED ***ARMORICA.*** (OBVIOUSLY NOT TO BE MISTAKEN FOR AMERICA!) THIS IS ONLY BRIEFLY MENTIONED BUT I WANTED TO CLEAR UP ANY POTENTIAL CONFUSION!

(YOU KEEPING UP?)

HERE'S WHERE ***STONEHENGE*** WILL BE BUILT. THAT BIT IS *VERY IMPORTANT!*

THE ***SAXONS*** HAVE BEEN INVADING AND TAKING OVER BIG CHUNKS OF THE ***BRITISH ISLES***, OFTEN WITH THE HELP OF LOCAL CHIEFS. IT'S A TIME OF CONSTANT CONFLICT. THE RELICS OF ***ROME*** ARE EVERYWHERE, BUT THAT AGE IS ALMOST DONE.

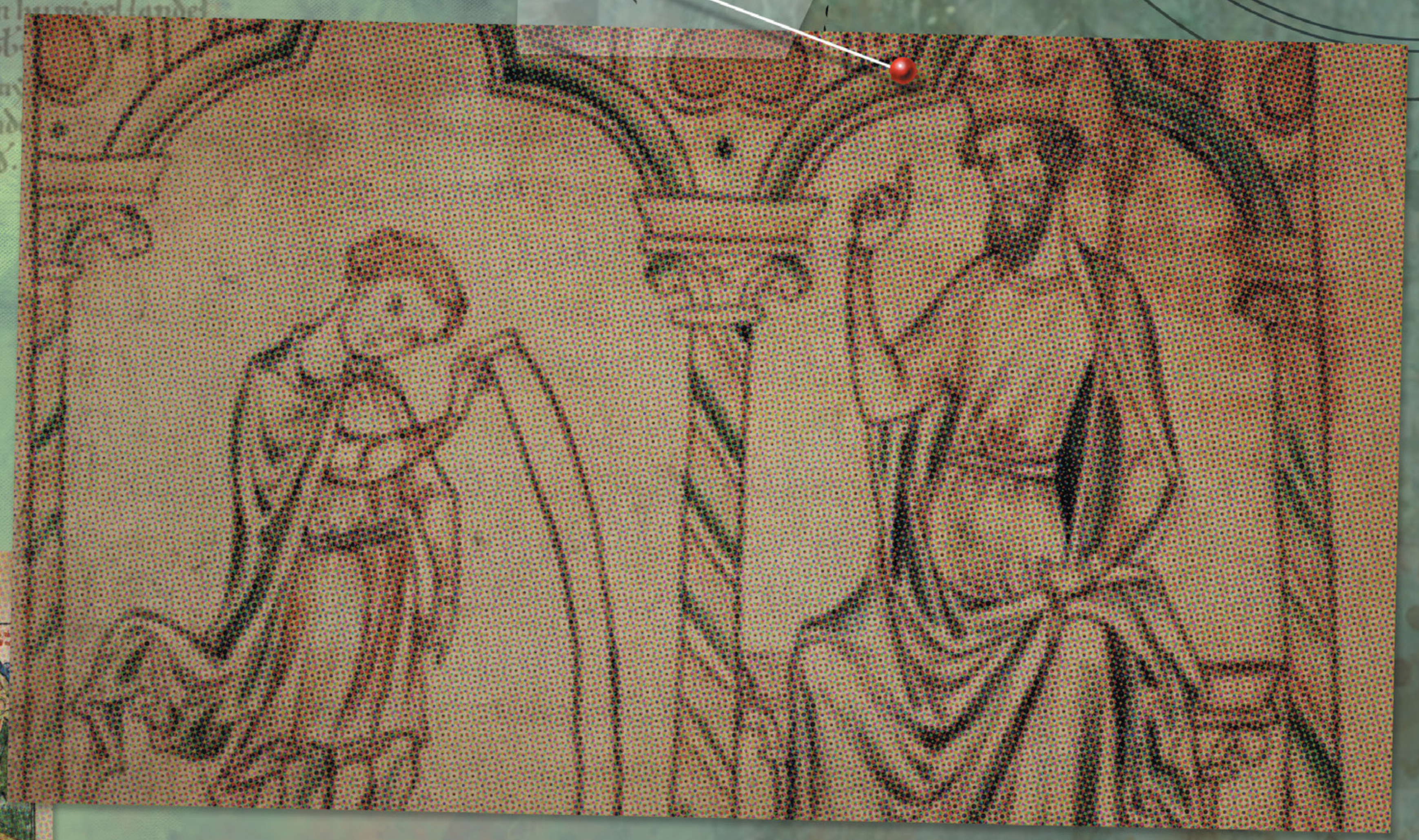
A NEW, *MYTHIC AGE* IS ON THE RISE, AS IS *CHRISTIANITY*. THE OLD GODS ARE LOSING THEIR POWER OVER THE PEOPLE, THOUGH SOME DRUIDIC TRADITIONS PERSIST.

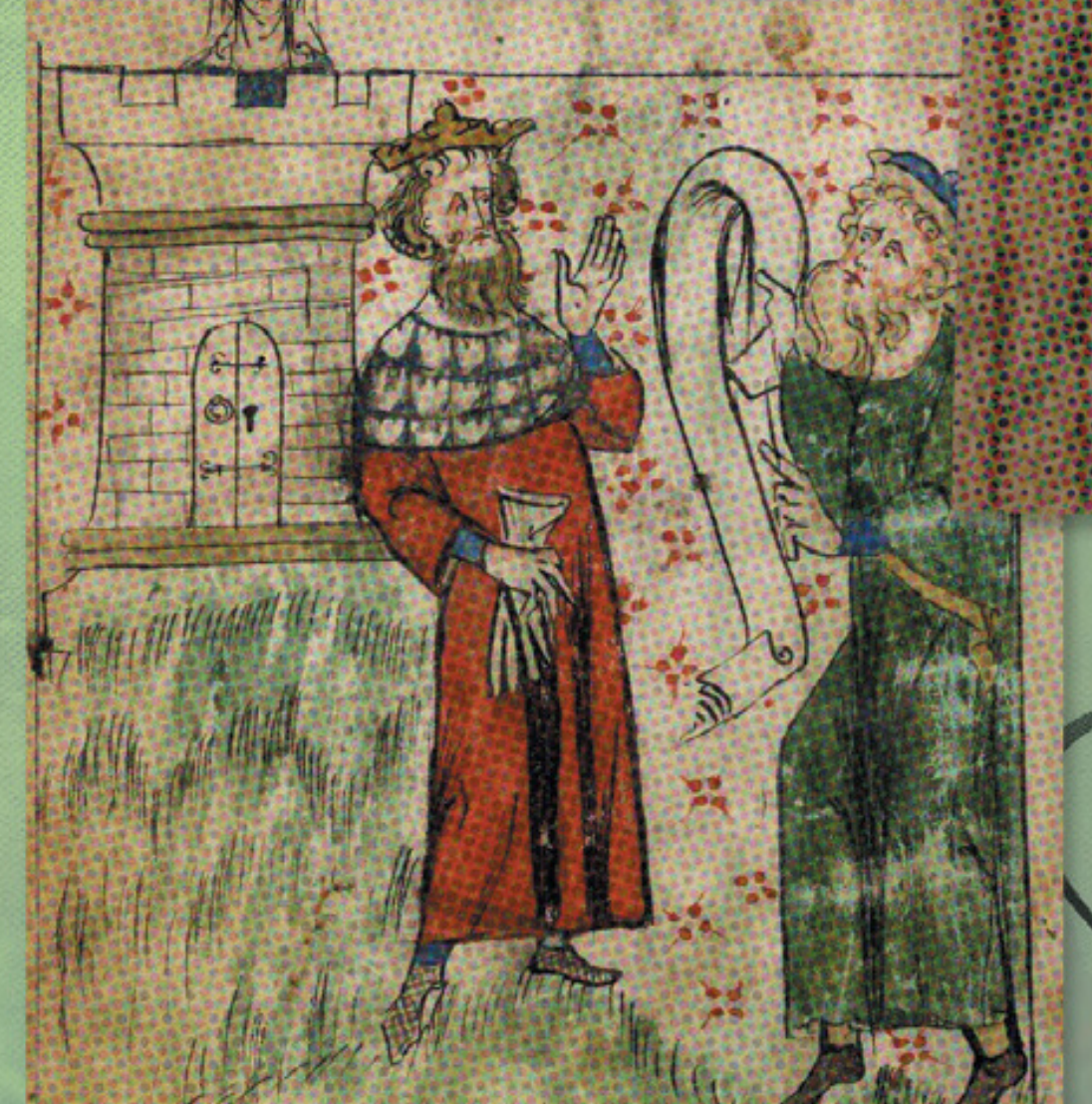
AND ***MAGIC*** IS REAL.

IT IS IN EVERYTHING.

THIS IS THE WORLD ***MERLIN*** FOUND HIMSELF IN. AND HE'S THE FIRST TO ADMIT - HE MADE SOME MISTAKES!

ONE SUCH MISTAKE WAS IN TRYING TO SPEED THINGS UP BY GIVING ADVICE TO THE CORRUPT KING OF THE TIME - A FORMER WELSH CHIEFTAIN CALLED ***VORTIGERN...***





(YOUNG) MERLIN –
(READING A LOOONG LIST BY THE LOOKS OF IT!)

VORTIGERN THE THIN –
AND YES HE IS!

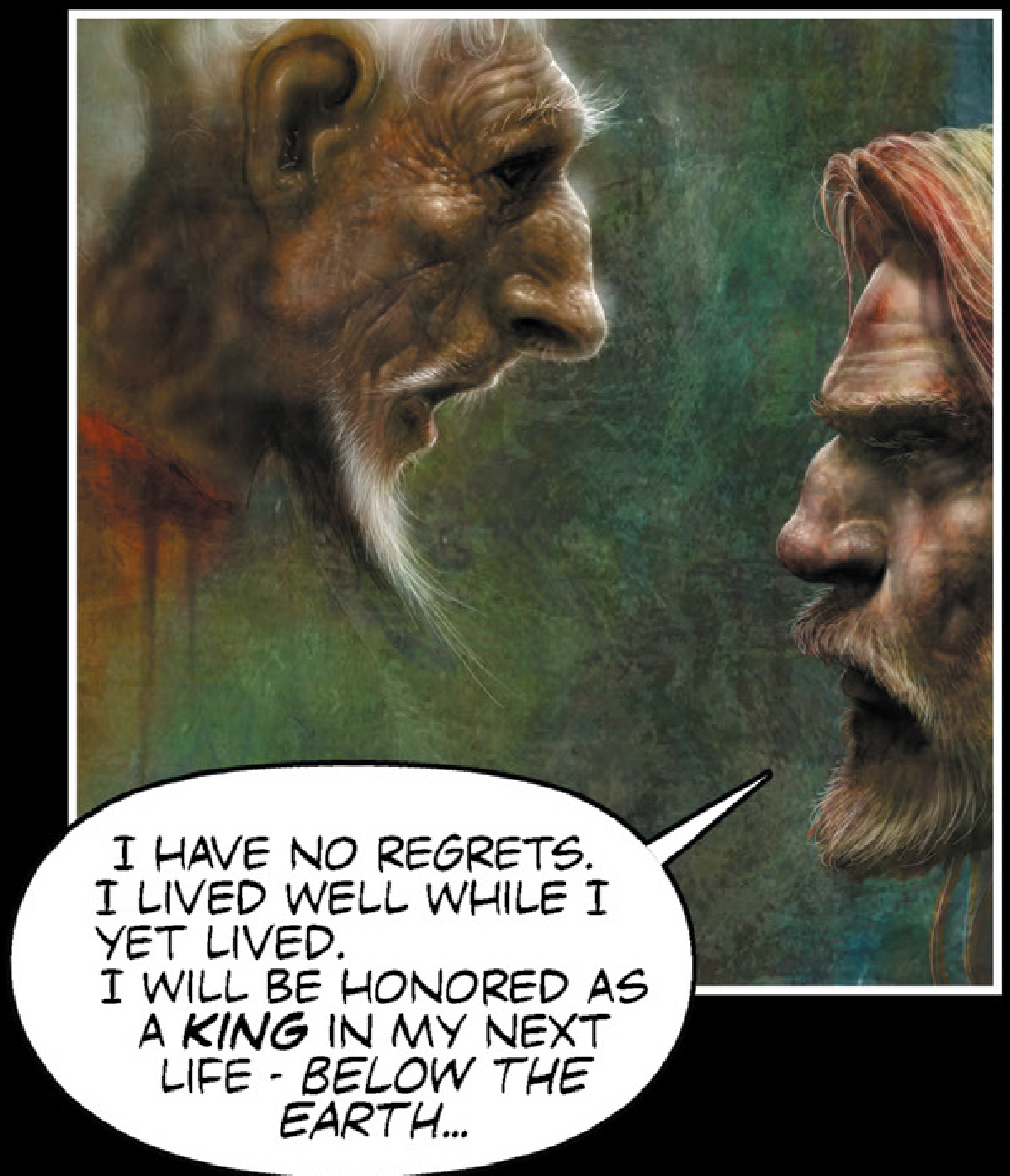
KING VORTIGERN THE THIN AND HIS ALLY, ***HENGIST*** (A *GERMANIC PAGAN CHIEF* WHO'D LED THE ***SAXONS*** IN AN *INVASION OF BRITAIN* AND NOW RULED ***KENT***) DIDN'T LISTEN WHEN ***MERLIN*** GAVE THEM THIS *MASSIVE* TIP-OFF:
THAT THE *THREAT* FROM THE SONS OF THE FORMER KING, ***CONSTANTINE III,*** WAS VERY REAL, AND INDEED, IMMINENT -
THE PRINCES, ***AURELIUS*** AND ***UTHER,*** HAD FITTED OUT SHIPS...
THEY HAD LEFT ***ARMORICA***
AND WERE NOW SAILING HOME -
TO ***BRITAIN.***
HE TOLD VORTIGERN THAT THEY WERE INTENT ON CONQUERING THE ***SAXONS*** (WHOM THEY DETESTED, AND NOT WITHOUT REASON!) ONCE AND FOR ALL...
AND THEY ACTUALLY SUCCEEDED!
THOUGH IT COSTS THEM THOUSANDS OF LIVES.
VORTIGERN AND HENGIST WERE TAKEN CAPTIVE.

(THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T LISTEN TO MERLIN. SOME PEOPLE NEVER LEARN THAT!)
NOW THE OLDER BROTHER, AURELIUS, WAS THE KING, SO MERLIN HEADED FOR THE HILLS TO LIE LOW. AURELIUS, MEANWHILE, DEALT WITH THE TRAITOROUS OLD KING...
AT LAST. BRING HIM IN.

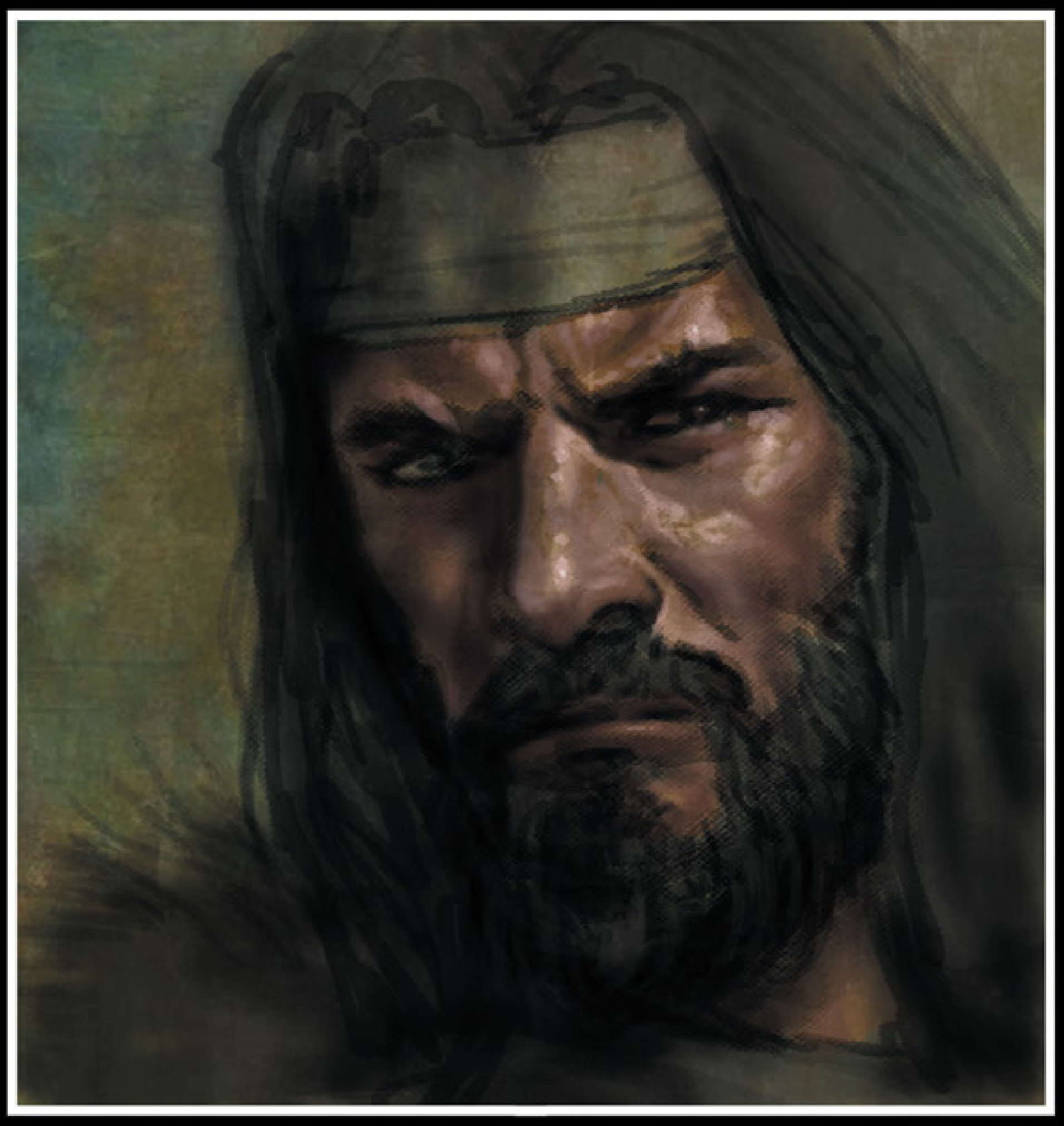
IS THIS SCRAWNY OLD MAN **VORTIGERN**, THE BASTARD OVERLORD OF THE GEWISSEI?
THE GREAT BEAST WHO MURDERED MY FATHER, **KING CONSTANTINE III**, AND MADE A SIMPERING FOOL OUT OF MY PATHETIC BROTHER, **CONSTANS**?
MOCK ME ALL YOU LIKE, **AURELIUS.** I WAS JUST A *WELSH CHIEFTAIN*, BUT I ROSE TO BECOME **KING** OF ALL THE **BRITONS!**
WHAT'S DONE IS DONE...
MY FATHER REIGNED IN PEACE FOR **TEN YEARS!**
WHERE ABIDES SUCH HARMONY NOW?

SO MUCH FOR YOUR **WELSH DRAGON!**

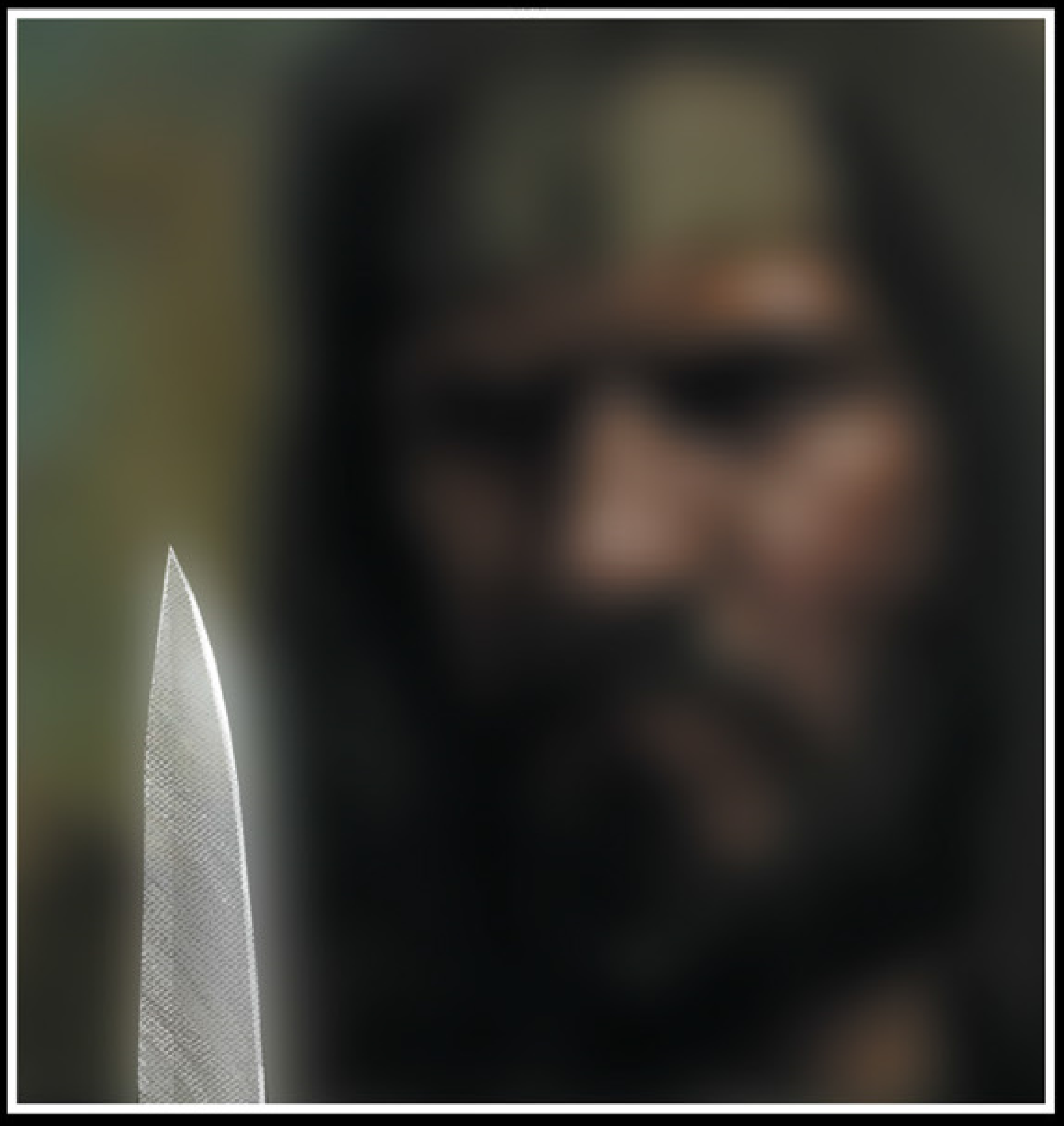
WELL? WAS IT ALL WORTH IT, ***HENGIST?*** HOW MANY *NOBLE BRITONS* DIED THAT YOU SHOULD RULE ***KENT?***
NO DOUBT YOU FANCIED YOURSELF IN OLD ***VORTIGERN'S*** CROWN TOO...


I HAVE NO REGRETS. I LIVED WELL WHILE I YET LIVED. I WILL BE HONORED AS A **KING** IN MY NEXT LIFE - *BELOW THE EARTH*...

YOU PAGAN **SCUD-RAGS** AND YOUR ***BLASPHEMOUS BELIEFS!***
IT MAY BE AS THEY SAY, THAT YOU DO NOT FEAR DEATH...



BUT ALL MEN MUST SURELY FEAR **DYING.**
AND EVEN MORE SO, THE ***METHOD*** OF IT...



THIS IS HOW **GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH**, TELLS IT:

'AURELIUS, AFTER HE HAD ASKED A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS CONCERNING MERLIN, DISPATCHED SEVERAL MESSENGERS INTO THE COUNTRY TO FIND HIM OUT, AND BRING HIM TO HIM.

'AS SOON AS THEY HAD DELIVERED THEIR MESSAGE TO HIM, THEY CONDUCTED HIM TO THE KING, WHO RECEIVED HIM WITH JOY, AND, BEING CURIOUS TO HEAR SOME OF HIS WONDERFUL SPEECHES, COMMANDED HIM TO PROPHESY.

'MERLIN MADE ANSWER:

'"MYSTERIES OF THIS KIND ARE NOT TO BE REVEALED BUT WHEN THERE IS GREATEST NEED. IF I SHOULD EVER PRETEND TO UTTER SUCH - FOR OSTENTATION OR DIVERSION - THE SPIRIT THAT INSTRUCTS ME WOULD BE SILENT."

HM. WELL THEN - I'LL TAKE YOU AT YOUR WORD. I HAVE LITTLE ENOUGH TIME FOR DOUBT! HERE GREAT MEN LIE BURIED, MERLIN. THE BUTCHERED VICTIMS OF HENGIST AND VORTIGERN. I WEEP FOR THEM, AND I NEEDS MUST HONOR THEM. AS IS THEIR RIGHT! AND YET THE FINEST MASONS AND CARPENTERS THIS LAND HAS TO OFFER HAVE FAILED ME!
I SENT FOR YOU BECAUSE IT IS SAID YOU ARE A PROPHET, AND THE MOST INGENIOUS ENGINEER OF OUR TIMES. CAN YOU RAISE A SHRINE, MERLIN? ONE WORTHY OF SUCH SACRIFICE AS WAS MADE HERE?

'"IF YOU ARE DESIROUS," SAID MERLIN, "TO HONOR THE BURYING-PLACE OF THESE MEN WITH AN EVERLASTING MONUMENT, SEND FOR THE ***GIANT'S DANCE****, WHICH IS IN* ***KILLARAUS****, A MOUNTAIN IN* ***HIBERNIA****. THERE ARE STONES THERE THAT NONE OF THIS AGE COULD RAISE - OF VAST MAGNITUDE AND WONDERFUL QUALITY - AND IF THEY CAN BE PLACED HERE, AROUND THIS SPOT OF GROUND, THEY WILL STAND FOREVER."*

'AT THESE WORDS OF MERLIN, AURELIUS BURST INTO LAUGHTER, AND SAID:

'"HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO REMOVE SUCH HUGE STONES FROM SO DISTANT A COUNTRY, AS IF BRITAIN WAS NOT FURNISHED WITH STONES ENOUGH FIT FOR THE WORK?"

'MERLIN REPLIED, "I ENTREAT YOUR MAJESTY TO FORBEAR VAIN LAUGHTER, FOR WHAT I SAY IS WITHOUT VANITY..."'

YEAH. RIGHT!

MERLIN IS SO VAIN HE PROBABLY THINKS THIS COMIC IS ABOUT HIM!

AND IF ALL THIS SOUNDS A BIT RIPE, I WOULD HAVE TO AGREE.

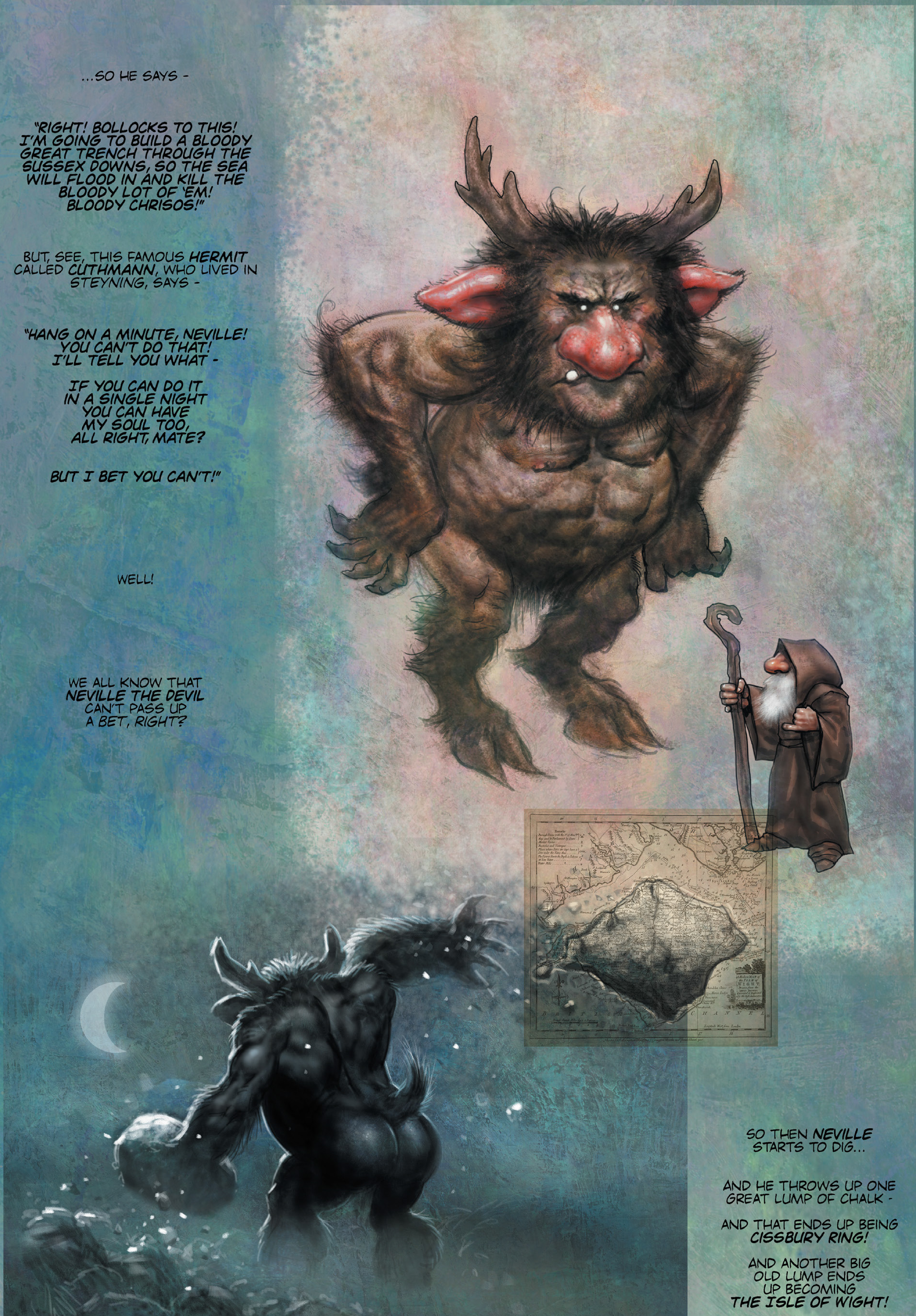
I'M PRETTY SURE HE WAS MAKING IT ALL UP AS HE WENT...

SPEAK, SAGE. TELL ME MORE. DISPEL MY DOUBTS...
NOBLE KING AURELIUS, IT IS AS CLEAR TO ME AS THE WATER THAT WELLS IN THE UNDERGROUND HOLLOWS OF **GWENT** - - WATER THAT IS OF *SUCH* PURITY IT CAN SCARCELY BE SEEN OR FELT - - ONLY *ONE* STRUCTURE ALONE IN ALL THESE ISLES WILL BE MONUMENT ENOUGH TO HONOR THE MIGHTY WHO LIE FALLEN HERE...
"THEY ARE MYSTICAL STONES," SAID MERLIN, "AND OF A MEDICINAL VIRTUE..."
"THE GIANTS OF OLD BROUGHT THEM HERE - FROM THE FARTHEST COAST OF **AFRICA** - AND PLACED THEM IN **HIBERNIA**..."
"THERE IS NOT A STONE THERE WHICH HAS NOT SOME HEALING VIRTUE..."
WHEN AURELIUS HEARD THIS HE RESOLVED TO SEND FOR THE STONES.
AND TO ACCOMPLISH THIS BUSINESS HE MADE CHOICE OF HIS BROTHER,
UTHER
A FLEET BEING THEREFORE GOT READY, THEY SET SAIL...

SO, YEAH.
THAT HAPPENED.
THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS THE CREATION OF ***THE STARHENGE***
- AND THE FUTURE PROTECTION OF ***MAGIC*** -
WERE SET IN PLACE.
HISTORY IN MOTION.
MY LIFE, MEANWHILE, WAS BRIEFLY MORE LIKE ***THE HOLIDAY***
(MINUS THE SNOW, AND WITH A SIDE ORDER OF PTSD).

OH COOL!
I REMEMBER THAT!
THE *HORNY* DUDE!
WHAT DO THEY SAY ABOUT TAKING ONE TO...
NEVER MIND.
HEY! ROAD TRIP?
I WANT TO GET OUT OF HERE FOR A WHILE...
SO - FIRST STOP...

...THE DEVIL'S DYKE!
I'M SO SORRY. ABOUT LAST YEAR...
IT WAS A MESS. I WAS MEANT TO GET THIS BIG COLLEGE FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP, BUT SOMETHING STRANGE SHOWED UP IN MY BLOOD AND THEY ACCUSED ME OF TAKING PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS... I WASN'T THOUGH! I SWEAR!
AND MY PARENTS... I WAS ADOPTED, AND THEY...
ANYWAY. WHATEVER, BRUH. IT'S JUST ME NOW. I HAD A BIT OF A... WILD YEAR. LOST MYSELF, YOU KNOW? AND THAT'S WHY...
HEY. IT'S OK. YOU'RE HERE NOW. WE'RE HERE NOW.
AND IT'S MY TURN TO TELL YOU ABOUT THIS PLACE!
RIGHT! SO, THEN - SUSSEX WAS THE LAST OF THE ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS TO CONVERT TO THE LATEST SHINY NEW FAITH, CHRISTIANITY.
ANYWAY, THE STORY GOES THAT THE DEVIL - WHO I'M CALLING NEVILLE, AND WHO LIVED IN ENGLAND AT THE TIME, NATURALLY - WAS ALL PISSED OFF ABOUT IT...



...SO HE SAYS -

"RIGHT! BOLLOCKS TO THIS! I'M GOING TO BUILD A BLOODY GREAT TRENCH THROUGH THE SUSSEX DOWNS, SO THE SEA WILL FLOOD IN AND KILL THE BLOODY LOT OF 'EM! BLOODY CHRISOS!"

BUT, SEE, THIS FAMOUS **HERMIT** CALLED **CUTHMANN**, WHO LIVED IN STEYNING, SAYS -

"HANG ON A MINUTE, NEVILLE! YOU CAN'T DO THAT! I'LL TELL YOU WHAT -

IF YOU CAN DO IT IN A SINGLE NIGHT YOU CAN HAVE MY SOUL TOO, ALL RIGHT, MATE?

BUT I BET YOU CAN'T!"

WELL!

WE ALL KNOW THAT **NEVILLE THE DEVIL** CAN'T PASS UP A BET, RIGHT?

SO THEN **NEVILLE** STARTS TO DIG...

AND HE THROWS UP ONE GREAT LUMP OF CHALK -

AND THAT ENDS UP BEING **CISSBURY RING!**

AND ANOTHER BIG OLD LUMP ENDS UP BECOMING **THE ISLE OF WIGHT!**

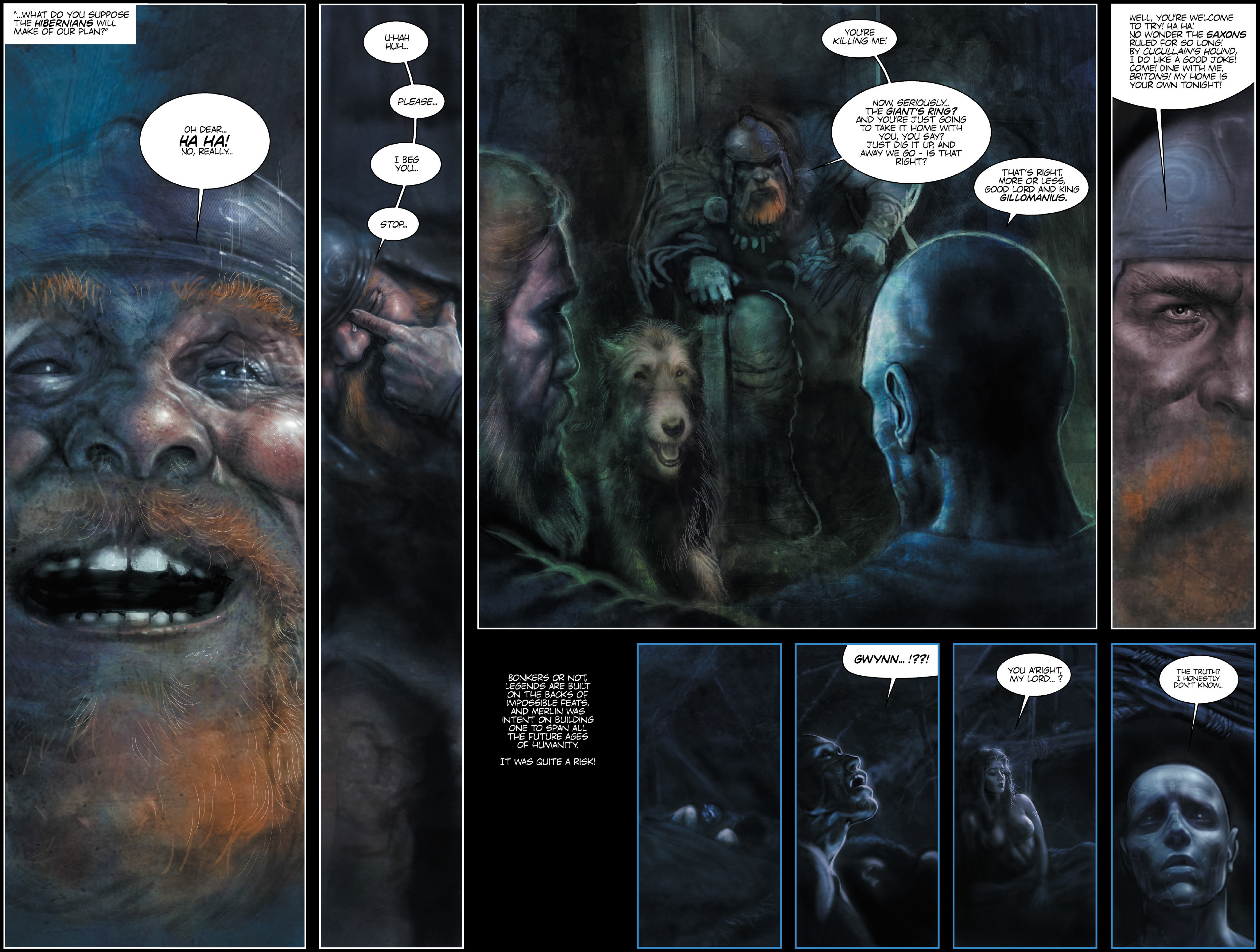
AND THEN ANOTHER BECOMES **FIRLE BEACON...**

CUTHMANN, MEANWHILE, GETS UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND LIGHTS A CANDLE AT THE WINDOW OF HIS *LITTLE* SUSSEX COTTAGE...
AND HE STARTLES THIS ***COCK***, WHICH THEN THINKS IT'S THE MORNING -
SO *IT* STARTS *CROWING!*
AND OLD *NEVILLE* - WHO, AS MY DAD USED TO SAY, WAS *NOT* THE SHARPEST TOOL IN THE TOOLBOX - WHEN HE SEES THE LIGHT AND HEARS THE COCK, HE ALSO THINKS IT'S MORNING!
AND SO THEREFORE HE'S LOST THE BET! AND OFF HE STORMS, INTO THE NIGHT, LEAVING ALL THIS BEHIND HIM...
AND THAT IS THE VERIFIED, 100% TRUE STORY OF THE CREATION OF THE DEVIL'S DYKE, AS PER *WIKIPEDIA*.

THEY SAY NEVILLE AND HIS MISTRESS, ***LILIBURLERO***, ARE BURIED DOWN THERE SOMEWHERE TOO…
WHAT? WAIT… NEVILLE ***DIED?!!?***
YUP! GOD TOO, PROBABLY… OR AT THE VERY LEAST HE'S BOGGED OFF AND ABANDONED US! CAN'T SAY I BLAME HIM REALLY! ANYWAY… I'M A *FILTHY PAGAN* AND PREFER THE OLD GODS. THEY ARE MUCH MORE RELIABLY UNRELIABLE! COME ON YOU! TIME TO HIT THE ROAD…
SUSSEX
ENGLISH CHANNEL
Scale of Miles
Drawn by R. Creighton
DRAWN AND ENGRAVED FOR LEWIS' TOPOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY
Engraved by J. & C. Walker

...LOOKS LIKE A STORM'S COMING IN...

THIS IS A DAMN FOOL WASTE OF TIME, WIZARD!
LORD **UTHER**, SIRE - I AM NO WIZARD. AND WHAT'S MORE...
I SAY YOU'RE A WIZARD SO YOU ARE A WIZARD! AND MY BROTHER IS A DAMN FOOL FOR LISTENING TO YOU!
IT'S TRUE. IN THE ***5TH CENTURY***, MAGIC *WAS*, AS I'VE SAID, STILL COMMONPLACE -
BUT I WAS THERE, AND THE JURY IS STILL OUT AS TO WHAT *EXTENT*...
LISTEN - THE POWERS I CHANNEL ARE ***SIGILS***, BASED ON ***SCIENCE*** - THE LAYS AND ENERGIES OF *ANCIENT* AND *FUTURE*...
MERLIN WOULD TELL US HE SPOKE TO *ANCIENT SPIRITS*, AND EVEN ***GODS***...
BE *SILENT*, WIZARD! YOU THINK I GIVE A *BOAR'S TURD* ABOUT SUCH STUFF?
I SWEAR, IF THIS *DOES* PROVE A FOOL'S ERRAND THEN YOUR *HEAD* WILL BE MY BROTHER'S ONLY REWARD... IF THE ***GIANT'S RING*** IS ALL IT IS SAID TO BE, GOD HELP YOU, MERLIN!
BUT DESPITE THE TRUTH OF HIS HERITAGE, THE NATURE OF HIS MISSION, THE PROFOUND PEDIGREE OF HIS DNA, HE WAS ALSO A DAMAGED AND FLAWED MAN, PRONE TO DELUSION, AND FREQUENTLY QUESTIONING OF HIS OWN SANITY.
THE CLASSIC *HOLY* FOOL.
(APPARENTLY ***TIME TRAVEL*** CAN DO THAT TO YOU. YOU CAN END UP INSANE, OR AMNESIAC, OR BOTH - TEMPORARILY, OR FOREVER. WHO KNEW?)
EITHER WAY - *THIS* IS HOW HE TOLD IT...
HA!
SUCH IS YOUR DESTINY! AND YOU CAN BLAME YOUR MOTHER FOR THAT!
DO YOU THINK ME MAD, ***CERNUNNOS?***
YUP
CERNUNNOS. CLOVEN HOOVES, THE WORKS!
APPARENTLY HE WOULD JUST SORT OF ***POP UP*** SOMETIMES. OUT OF *NOWHERE*...
WHICH, I MEAN, IS REALLY FUCKING COOL - ESPECIALLY ME BEING INTO ***WICCA***, AND ALL THAT - BUT STILL...
LET'S JUST SAY - I'VE NEVER MET HIM. YET. SO...
UP TO YOU!
SO TELL ME...


"...WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE THE **HIBERNIANS** WILL MAKE OF OUR PLAN?"
OH DEAR... **HA HA!** NO, REALLY...
U-HAH HUH...
PLEASE...
I BEG YOU...
STOP...
YOU'RE KILLING ME!
NOW, SERIOUSLY... THE **GIANT'S RING?** AND YOU'RE JUST GOING TO TAKE IT HOME WITH YOU, YOU SAY? JUST DIG IT UP, AND AWAY WE GO - IS THAT RIGHT?
THAT'S RIGHT. MORE OR LESS, GOOD LORD AND KING **GILLOMANIUS.**
WELL, YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY! HA HA! NO WONDER THE **SAXONS** RULED FOR SO LONG! BY CUCULLAIN'S HOUND, I DO LIKE A GOOD JOKE! COME! DINE WITH ME, BRITONS! MY HOME IS YOUR OWN TONIGHT!
GWYNN... !??!
YOU A'RIGHT, MY LORD... ?
THE TRUTH? I HONESTLY DON'T KNOW...

BONKERS OR NOT, LEGENDS ARE BUILT ON THE BACKS OF IMPOSSIBLE FEATS, AND MERLIN WAS INTENT ON BUILDING ONE TO SPAN ALL THE FUTURE AGES OF HUMANITY.

IT WAS QUITE A RISK!

SURE, I LIKED YOUR STORIES WELL ENOUGH LIKE, BUT I CAN'T LET YOU TRAMPLE ALL OVER HIBERNIA WITH AN ARMY NOW, CAN I? WOULDN'T BE PROPER, WOULD IT?
BE A GOOD FELLA NOW. WE FED AND WATERED YOU. DID WE *NOT* TREAT YOU WELL?
SO GO ON HOME, LIKE I SUGGESTED IN GOOD FAITH, AND WE'LL BE DONE WITH THE MATTER...
...OR BY THE ***DAGDA'S GREAT CLUB***, I'LL REDDEN THIS EARTH WITH ***BRITON BLOOD***, RIGHT HERE AND NOW!

UTHER RESPECTED HIS BROTHER'S PLAN, NO MATTER WHAT. YOU COULDN'T FAULT HIS LOYALTY!
BUT THEN - FIGHTING REALLY WAS UTHER'S THING!

AND MERLIN? HE HAD BEEN *CARKED* FOR A FUTURE WAR! IF HE COULDN'T FIND A WAY TO GET OUT OF IT, ON THE BATTLEFIELD HE WAS A LITERAL ***MONSTER!***
MAGNIFICENT AND ARCANE!
(FUNNY HOW THE STORIES DON'T TALK ABOUT THAT BIT, RIGHT? I MEAN, IT'S PRETTY CLEAR THAT PEOPLE WHO BUILD THEIR LEGACY ON THEIR SUPPOSED TOTAL *BADASSERY* REALLY LIKE TO KEEP THAT REPUTATION STRICTLY FOR THEMSELVES...
YEAH. HISTORY IS FULL OF SELFISH BASTARDS.
TO BE FAIR THOUGH, MERLIN, BEING MERLIN, WOULD MUCH RATHER BE REMEMBERED AS A LOVER, NOT A FIGHTER. APPARENTLY HE WAS GOOD AT THAT TOO - ACCORDING TO HIMSELF!)

SO EVEN THOUGH THE **HIBERNIANS** WERE **FAMOUSLY UNBEATABLE**, THAT DAY THEY SUFFERED A RARE, HUMILIATING THRASHING.
(JUST DON'T EXPECT TO READ ABOUT IT IN *THE TAIN*!)
A **NEW** DRAGON WAS WAKING!
NOW THAT... FELT **GOOD!**
I EXPECT YOU WERE **HIDING** SOMEWHERE, MERLIN. NO?
HA! PROBABLY JUST AS WELL! THE *BATTLEFIELD* IS NO PLACE FOR SOMEBODY AS PALE AND WAIFLIKE AS YOU - YOU'D JUST GET IN THE WAY...
THE *BRITONS* RESTED A NIGHT, AND ALL BUT MERLIN SLEPT WELL.

AND TWO DAYS LATER, THEY ARRIVED AT THE ***GIANT'S RING*** ON ***MOUNT KILLARAUS.***
IT'S ***PERFECT!*** THAT'S JUST WHAT WE NEED...
ALL THIS WAY - FOR ***THAT?!!?***
IT'S NOT EVEN A ***REAL HENGE!*** JUST SOME BOULDERS...
SO? WHAT NOW, ***WIZARD?*** PERHAPS YOU CAN INSTRUCT THESE STONES TO GROW WINGS AND FLY BACK HOME FOR US, EH?
IDIOT!

CERTAINLY IT'S A CONUNDRUM...
'CONUNDRUM' YOU SAY? HA!
SOMETHING OF THE SORT!
I'LL SHARPEN MY SWORD AND READY A PIKE FOR YOUR NOGGIN...
YOU MOCK ME, MY LORD UTHER. BUT I'LL WAGER MY HEAD FOR A TRACT OF YOUR LAND, THAT I ALONE CAN ACHIEVE WHAT YOU AND ALL YOUR MEN CANNOT - I'LL MOVE THESE STONES!
BE MINDFUL NOW! YOUR FUTURE HANGS IN THE BALANCE...
YOU'RE EITHER A FOOL AND A MADMAN, OR YOU KNOW SOMETHING THAT I DO NOT...
EITHER WAY, IT SERVES MY PURPOSE. I'LL TAKE YOUR WAGER, WIZARD!
MEN! TEAR THIS PILE OF ROCKS TO THE GROUND!
WE'LL LAY US A FINE FEAST ON STONE TABLES THIS NIGHT!

FOR HOURS THEY TRIED! FLESH AGAINST STONE, WILL AGAINST ROCK!
THEY *TRIED...*
...WHILE ***MERLIN***, NO DOUBT, *SWEATED!*
AND THEN -
MAGIC HAPPENED.
SO WHAT NOW, DO YOU THINK, FRIEND?
I HAVE NO CLUE AT ALL HOW TO MOVE THESE DAMN STONES!
BUT I KNOW THEY SHOULD BE IN ***BRITAIN...***
I'VE SEEN THEM THERE...
YOU BELIEVE ME, DON'T YOU?
COME NOW, OLD MAN AS YET UNBORN - THE GREEN IS TIED NOT TO ONE LAND, BUT ALL LANDS.
AND THE STONES, LIKEWISE.
THESE ARE THE SPIRITS OF THE GREEN. THEY WILL HELP.
BUT - HOW?
CERNUNNOS! HOW?!!?

THERE ARE LOTS OF STORIES OF HOW THE STONES WERE MOVED FROM THE *EMERALD ISLE* OF ***HIBERNIA*** TO **BRITAIN** -
SOME TALK OF ARMIES, AND RAFTS, AND GREAT LEVERS AND ROPES...
OTHERS INSIST THE STONES WERE DRAGGED ON ROLLING LOGS, ALL THE WAY FROM **WALES** OR NEARER BY.
ROMANTIC FANTASISTS TALK OF FLAME-HAIRED HYBERNIAN GIANTS TOSSING THEM OVER THE ***IRISH SEA*** AT MERLIN'S BEHEST!
'IN ANCIENT TIMES,
HUNDREDS OF YEARS
BEFORE THE DAWN OF HISTORY...'
I KNOW, I KNOW... ALL VERY **SPINAL TAP** INDEED...

ME?
I THINK IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MERLIN'S *FUTURE SCIENCE* AT WORK - HE NEVER GAVE US A STRAIGHT ANSWER ON THAT - BUT *SOMEHOW*...
HE DID IT.
WITH OR WITHOUT THE HELP OF THE *HORNED GOD* ***CERNUNNOS*** AND THE *GREEN* - WHATEVER THE HELL THAT IS!

SOMEHOW...
OVERNIGHT...
IT WAS BUILT!
WHICH IS, OBVIOUSLY, **BONKERS!**
AND THERE'S *ZERO EVIDENCE* TO SUPPORT IT. LITERALLY NONE AT ALL! EVERYBODY KNOWS IT'S A *NEOLITHIC SUNDIAL* FOR FUCK'S SAKE! SO EVEN THE TIMELINES ARE *WAY* OFF...
BUT HE WAS THERE, AND THERE *IT* WAS.
STONEHENGE!
THAT INEFFABLE ***SIGIL*** -
N
The Altar
The Cell
The Entrance
Cubits
Feet
- A *CIRCLE*, LIKE A *PUNCTUATION MARK*, ANCHORING A TIMELINE AS YET UNWRITTEN...

HERE IS WHERE IT ALL TRULY BEGAN -

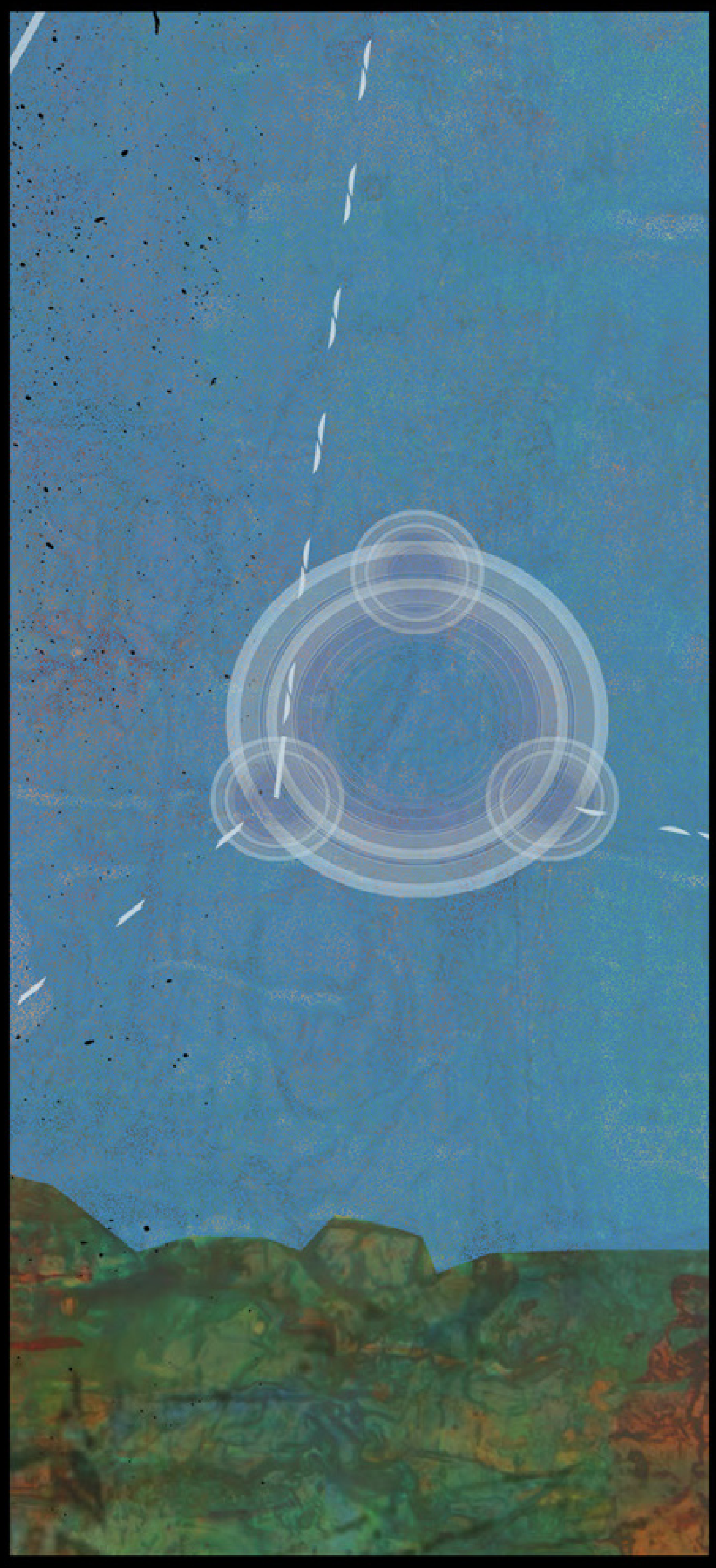
ON THE OUTER EDGE OF A *GREAT LOOP IN TIME.*

THE RUNES WERE CAST,

THE PATH, SET,

CLEARING THE WAY FOR '*THE BOAR*'.

ARTHUR, THE KING, WAS COMING!



SO I IMAGINE YOU'RE STILL WONDERING -

- WHAT DOES ANY OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ***ME?***

BECAUSE YOU KNOW IT ALL *LINKS UP*, RIGHT?

IT ALL HINGES
(HENGES?)
AROUND THIS PLACE -
STONEHENGE.
I HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE THE PLACE, AND STRANGELY I'D NEVER BEEN. BUT THERE WAS NO WAY I COULD HAVE KNOWN THE WIDER SIGNIFICANCE OF IT.
AND YET IT WAS...
HONESTLY?
A BIT UNDERWHELMING!
(I KNOW, I KNOW... SOUNDS HARSH!)
THERE'S A MAIN ROAD ON EITHER SIDE. HEAVY TRAFFIC. THERE ARE PATHS AND FENCES AND ROPED-OFF BITS AND A GIFT SHOP... BLAH-DI-BLAH...
IT FEELS...
SMALL!
NOT NEARLY AS MAJESTIC AS I HAD IMAGINED.
NOT VERY MAGIC AT ALL!
(BUT THEN I AM OVERLY ROMANTIC!)
AND YOU'RE NOT EVEN ALLOWED TO TOUCH THE STONES!

HEY! YO! WHAT ARE YOU...
I AM GOING TO HUG THAT BLOODY STONE!
NOBODY IS GOING TO...
Oh. Wow.
WHO... ?
A TEMPLE IN THE MANNER OF THE ANCIENTS, MERLIN?
NATURALLY, MY KING AURELIUS!
THE PEOPLE AND THE EARTH ARE ONE!
WHAT COULD BE BETTER FITTING THAN A MIGHTY EARTHWORK - THE GREATEST HENGE THIS HALLOWED ISLAND HAS EVER SEEN?
I HAD THOUGHT THE AGE OF MIRACLES LONG OVER. I WAS WRONG TO DOUBT YOU.
IT IS FAR FROM OVER, SIRE! THIS CONTAINS MORE POWER THAN YOU MIGHT EVER GUESS! MORE, I THINK, THAN PERHAPS EVEN I FULLY GRASP, YET -
THERE'S SOMETHING...

THERE'S SOMETHING...
WHAT?
HEY! GET OUT OF THERE! CAN'T YOU **READ?**
YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO TOUCH THE STONES!
BLOODY HIPPIES!

TIME...
THROUGH ALL THINGS, IT'S SAID, THERE ARE THREADS THAT CONVERGE.
MOMENTS THAT TOUCH OTHER MOMENTS.
TIME'S NOT LINEAR, AND IT NEVER WAS.
WE MAKE '*TIME*' WITH THE PROCESS OF JUST ***BEING.***
CREATING IT AS OUR ATOMS INTERACT WITH OTHER ATOMS, AND CHANGE.
AS ENERGY FIELDS MEET OTHER ENERGY FIELDS, AND CO-MINGLE.
IT'S ALL JUST PROCESS, STATES OF ***BEING.***
AND AS THE THREADS OF TIME'S EPHEMERAL FILIGREE BRUSH UP AGAINST ONE OTHER -
- SOMETIMES THINGS GET LEFT BEHIND...

OH FUCK! SHITSHITSHIT...
HEY - WHAT'S UP?
WE HAVE TO GO...
JUST LEAVE THE FUCKING...
I CAN'T! WE NEED IT! WHAT IF
THERE'S NO TIME! JUST THROW IT IN THE...
AMBER! THERE'S NOTHING OUT HERE...
TRUST ME, OK? PLEASE... NOW, DARYL... WE HAVE TO GO NOW!

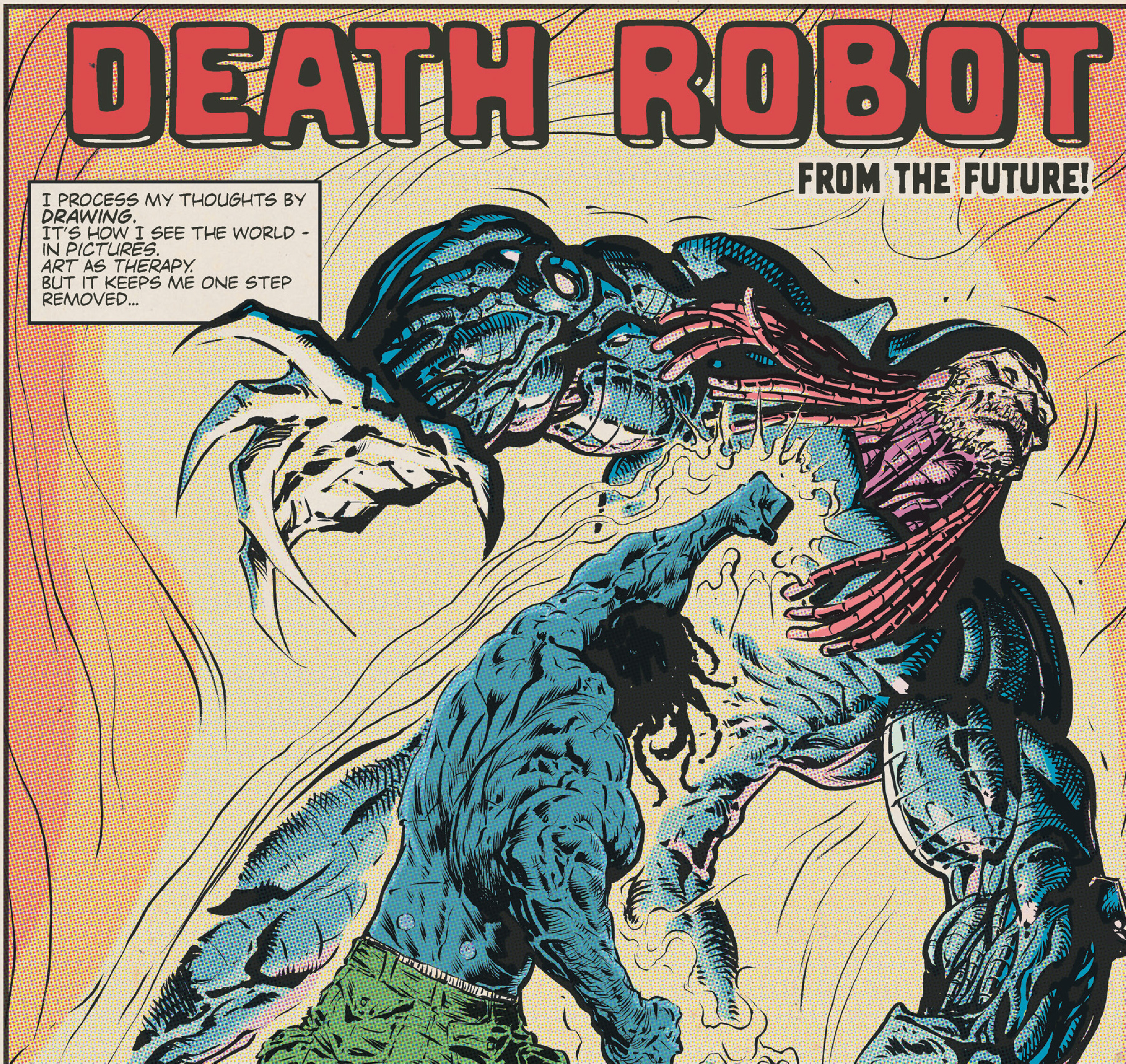
...AND SOMETIMES THINGS ***CROSS OVER.***

EVERYBODY HAS THEIR WTF MOMENTS. BUT NOBODY SAID THEY COME IN THREES. ON STEROIDS. WITH A CHERRY ON TOP...
OH FUCK! DARYL...
DARYL?
YES.
YES, THAT'S RIGHT, CHILD - IN A WAY...
BUT MY FIRST NAME WAS KUSHIM SAL,
THE SHAPE-CARK.
AND I HAVE BEEN WAITING A LONG TIME FOR YOU...

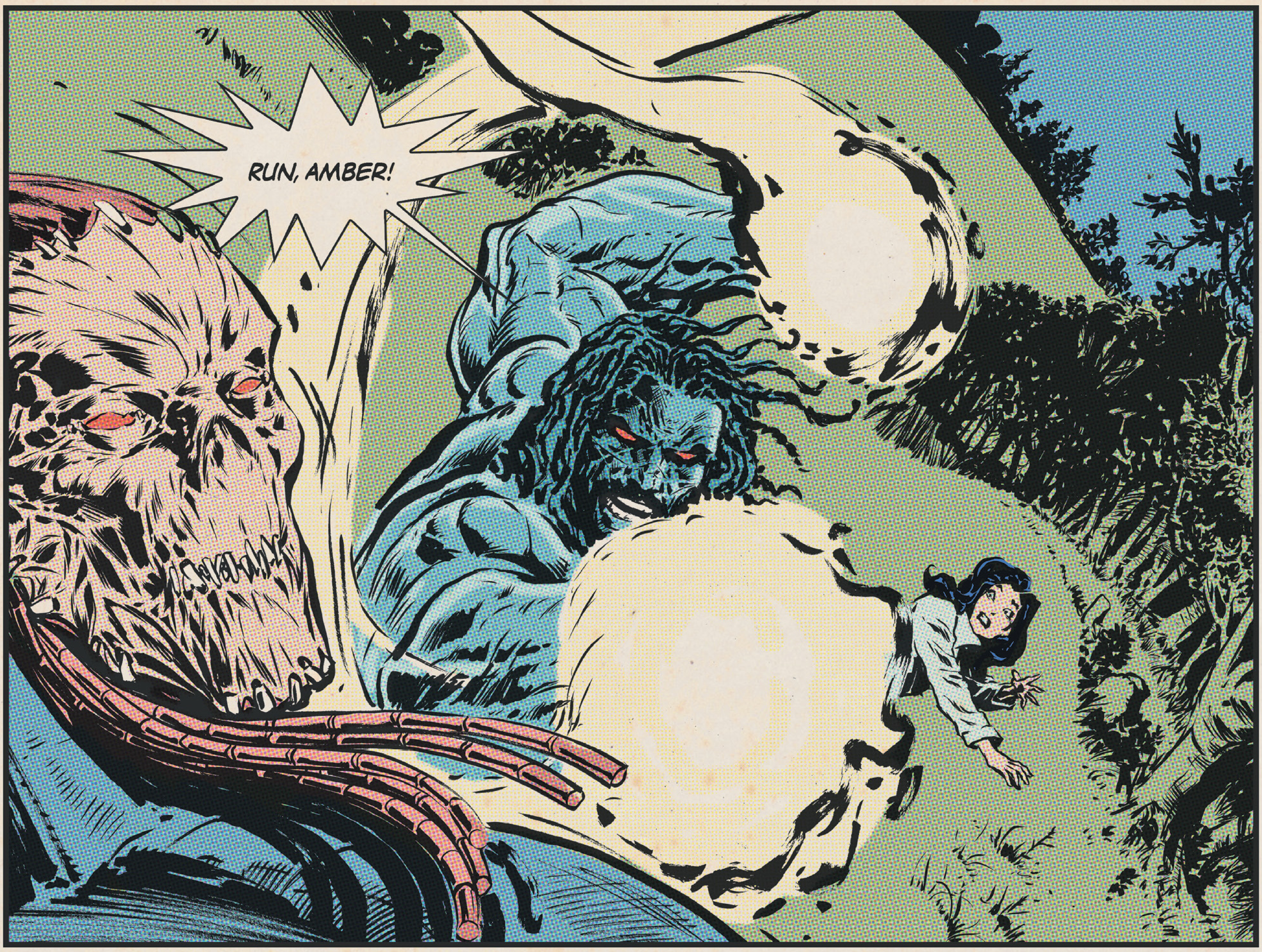
AMBER WEAVER AND KUSHIN SAL IN...

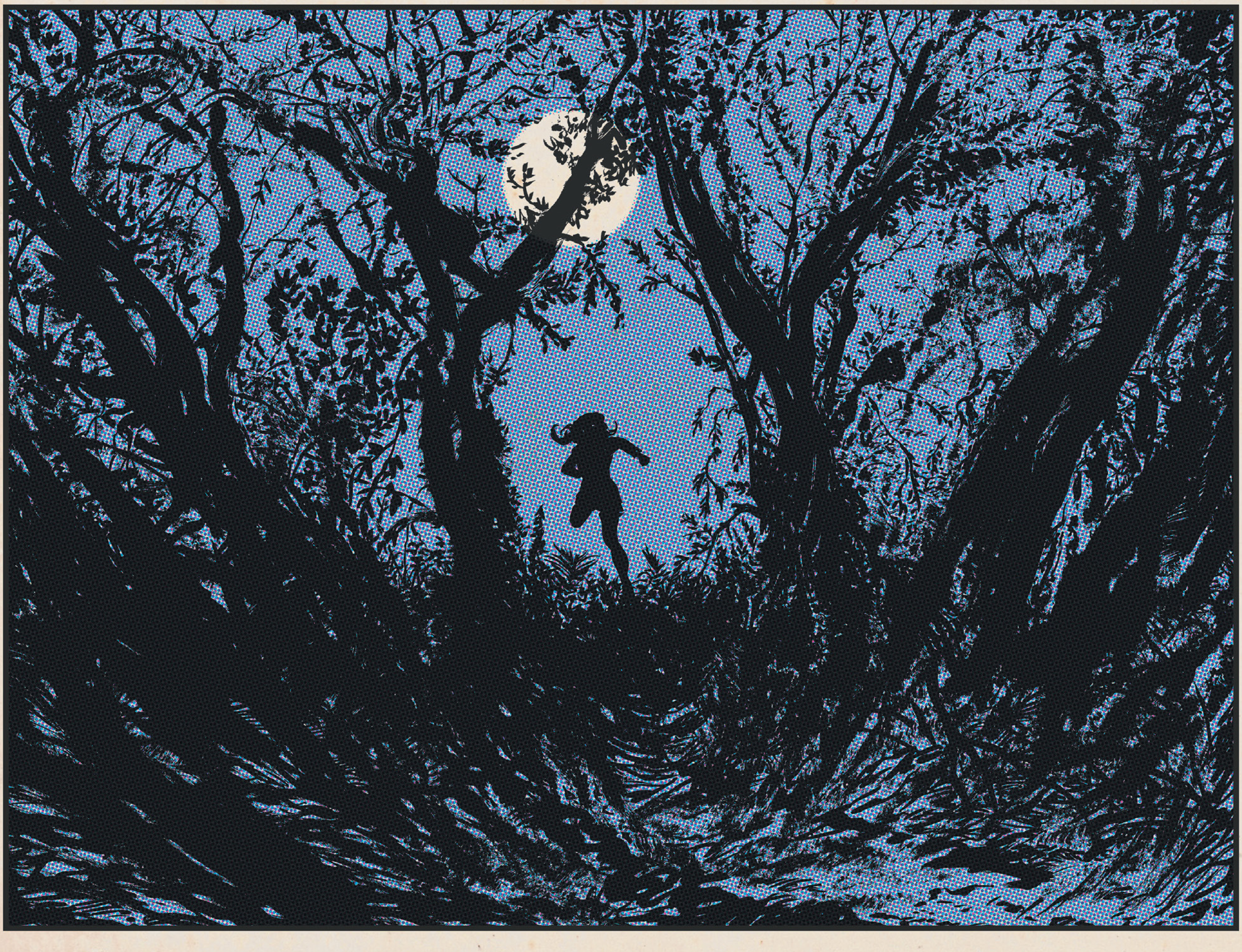
DEATH ROBOT

FROM THE FUTURE!

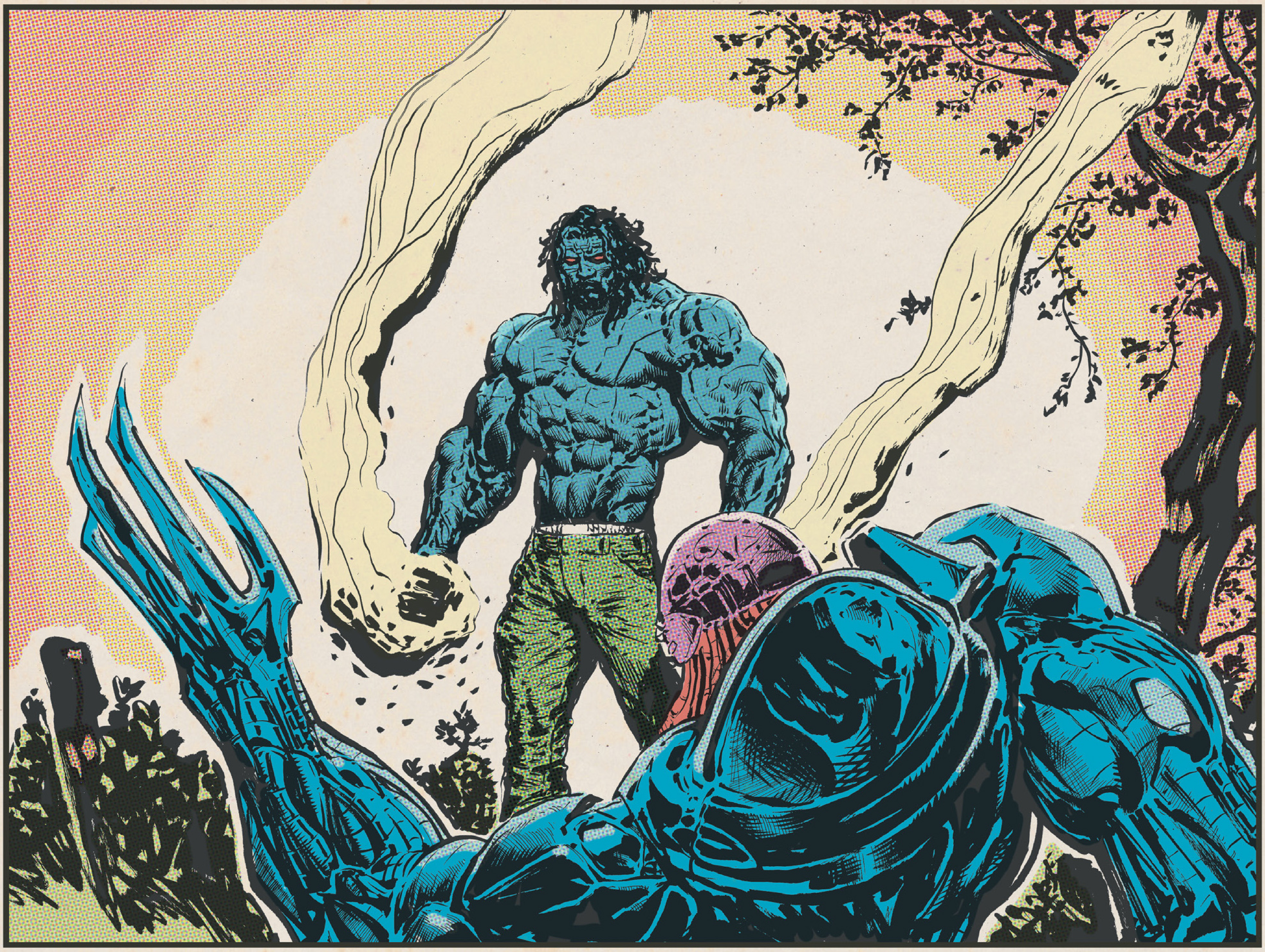

I PROCESS MY THOUGHTS BY DRAWING.
IT'S HOW I SEE THE WORLD - IN PICTURES.
ART AS THERAPY.
BUT IT KEEPS ME ONE STEP REMOVED...
LIKE I'M JUST A READER, OR WATCHER.
DAVE MCKEAN SAID THAT PHOTOS ARE JUST COMIC PANELS, RIGHT?
I MEAN, WHEN YOU REALLY THINK ABOUT IT WE'RE ALL MAKING COMICS OF OUR LIVES.
I LOVE COMICS - SAGA OR MONSTRESS ARE MY JAM.
BUT THIS WAS PURE OLD-SCHOOL MAINSTREAM MAYHEM...

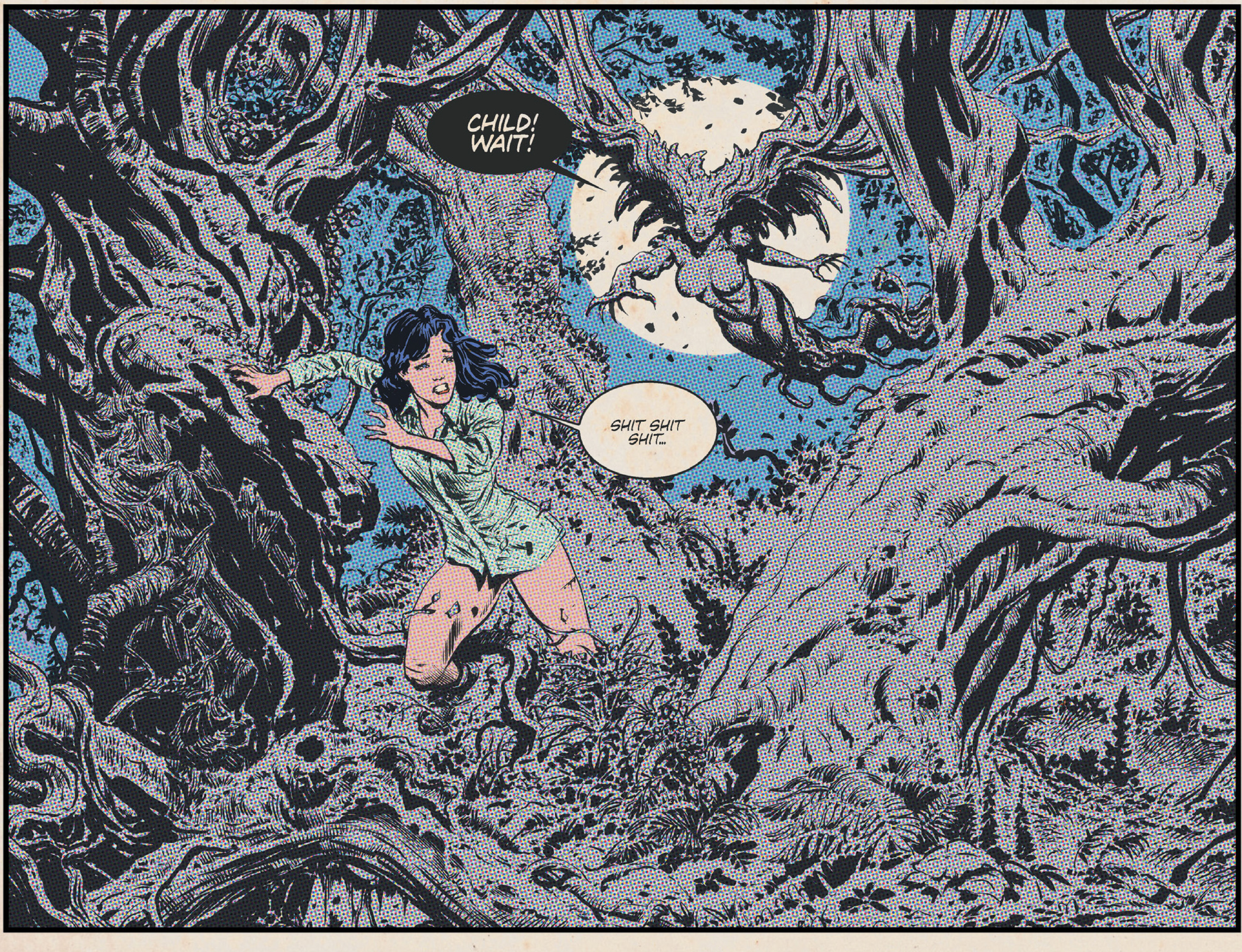
AMBER WEAVER WRITER
LIAM SHARP PENCILS
RALPH RAIMS INKS
'RAPS' MHAIL COLORS
BILL BLUNT LETTERS

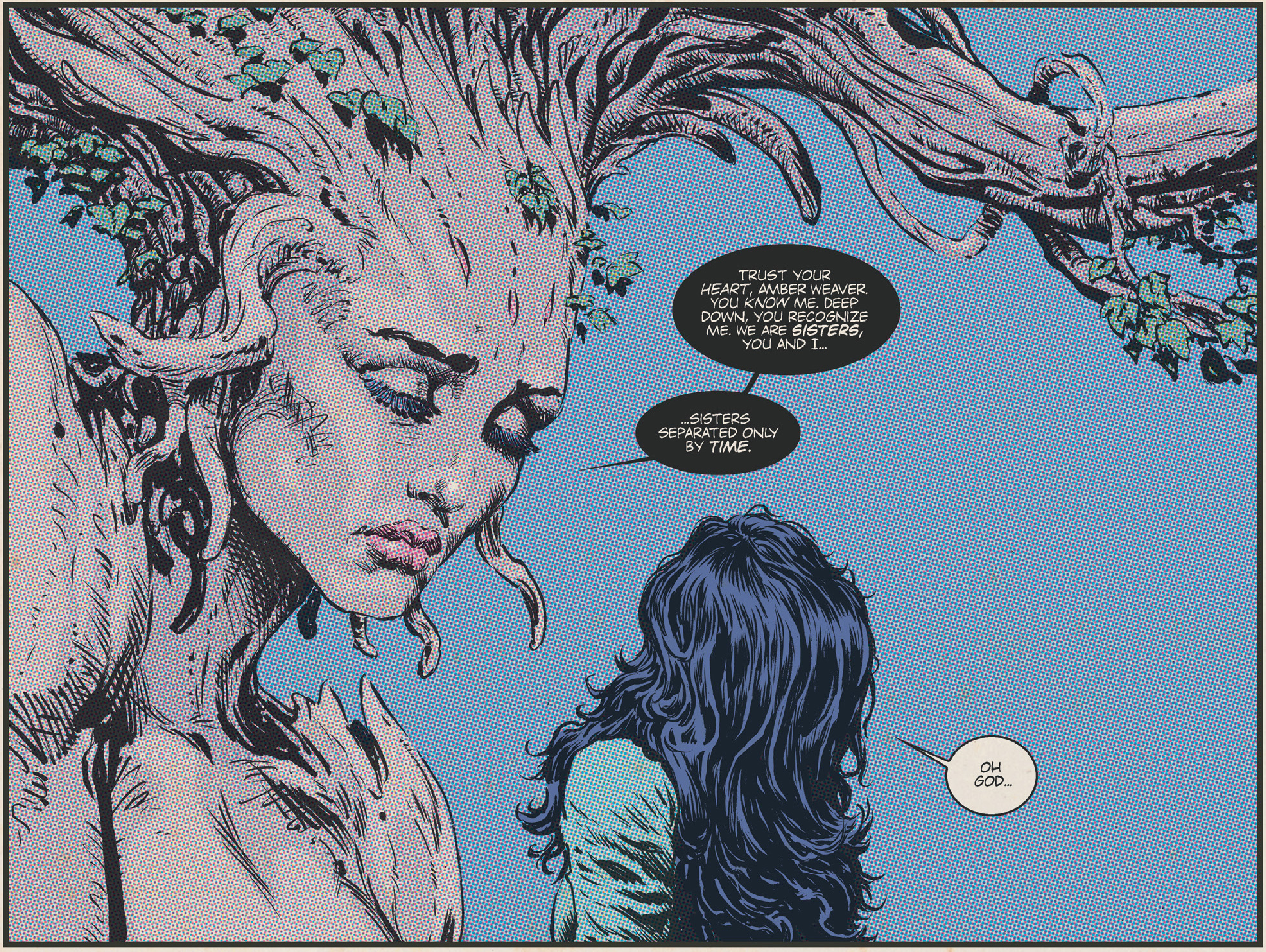

RUN, AMBER!

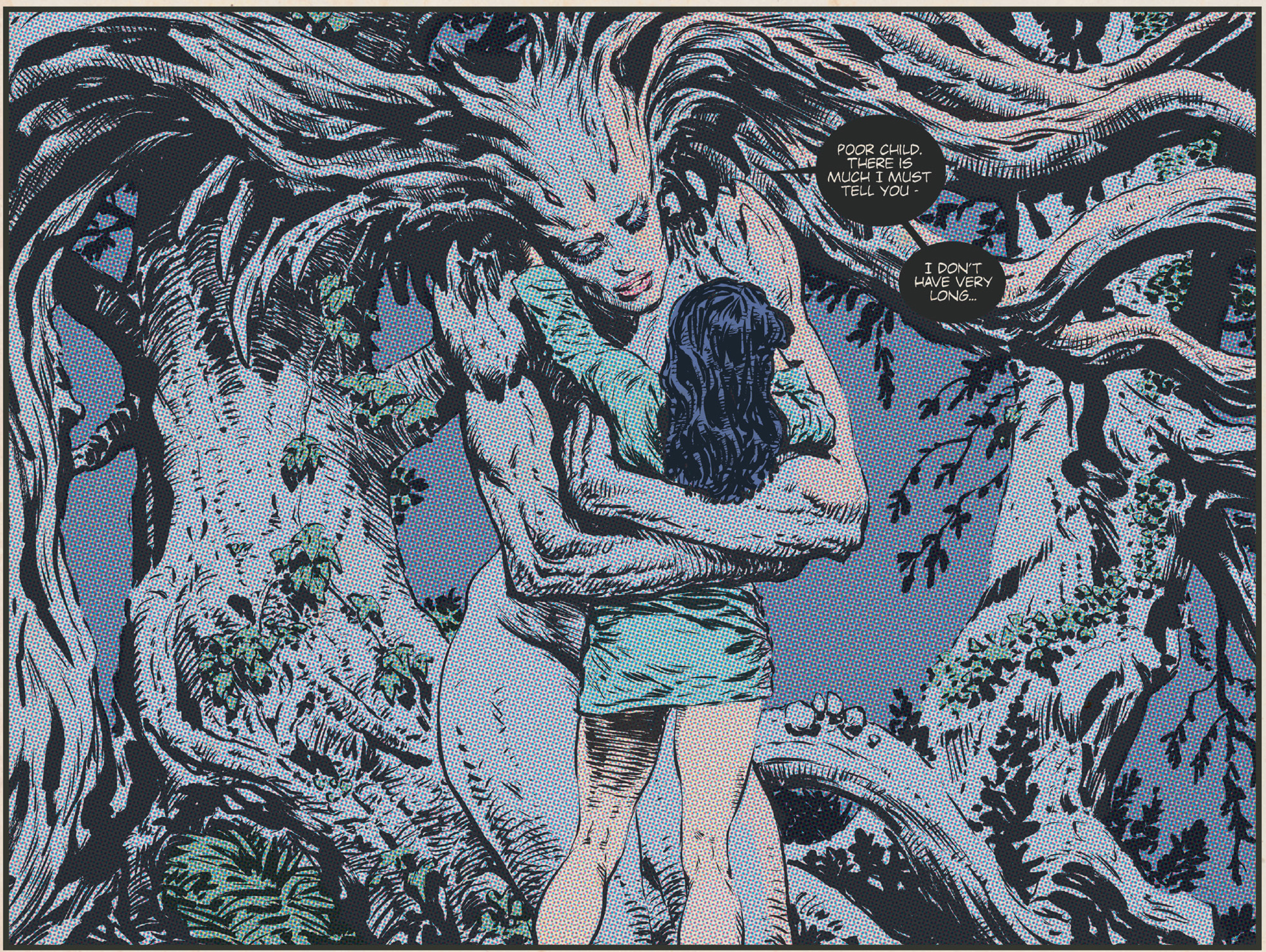


FUCK!




CHILD! WAIT!
SHIT SHIT SHIT...


TRUST YOUR HEART, AMBER WEAVER. YOU KNOW ME. DEEP DOWN, YOU RECOGNIZE ME. WE ARE **SISTERS,** YOU AND I...
...SISTERS SEPARATED ONLY BY ***TIME.***
OH GOD...


POOR CHILD. THERE IS MUCH I MUST TELL YOU -
I DON'T HAVE VERY LONG...

I DON'T ALWAYS HAVE THE WORDS. IF YOU'D BEEN THERE, SEEN IT, **DONE** IT, MAYBE YOU'D FIND A BETTER WAY OF CAPTURING THE MOST **INSANE** DAY IN A FEW CLEAR FUCKING LINES.
I WROTE SOME SHIT DOWN LATER - KEPT IT BECAUSE... *WTF?* I MEAN... HOW DO YOU... ? WHAT IS THERE TO... ? YOU CAN'T JUST... I DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT FUCKING WORDS. BUT MAYBE THIS WILL DO. IT'LL HAVE TO!
'My name traps time, which I can swim in. I once trapped a killer robot - from the future - in a blister of it. I watched it squirm, then still - a fossil of things unmade yet. My name traps time. And I can swim through it.'
THIS BIT... IT'S THE MOST *OPAQUE* MEMORY. I WAS THERE - SORT OF - BUT ALSO RUNNING ON... I DON'T KNOW. *INTUITION?* OR SOMETHING MORE LIKE DREAMS - SOMETHING HALF REMEMBERED...
OR SOMETHING YET TO BE... WHATEVER. IT WAS NOT REAL. COULD NOT BE REAL. I'D HAD ENOUGH FUCKING DRAMA! AND YET...
'Sometimes I remember - before the terror - the parting, like lips, a virgin's kiss. The very first time. How I danced, and you slept, and I watched and you healed.'
'Before the darkness. Before forever. Before I knew you - And yet loved you. My name traps time, god help me. I can fucking swim in it.'

SO, YEAH. SOME *BAT-SHIT* STUFF WENT DOWN - AND *I KNOW* I HAVE MORE *EXPLAINING* TO DO, BUT IF YOU DON'T ALSO GET THIS **MERLIN** BIT, *NONE* OF THIS WILL MAKE ANY FUCKING SENSE, OK?
REFRESHER -
HE'S IN THE **5TH CENTURY.**
HE HAS (SOMEHOW) BUILT **STONEHENGE**.
HE STILL HASN'T FOUND **GWYNN**.
AND HE'S GETTING OLDER, WEAKER, AND MORE, UHM, 'TROUBLED' EVERY DAY...
MY LORD. YOUR BROTHER, **AURELIUS**, HAS BEEN *POISONED*. HE'S DEAD, **UTHER**. I'M SO SORRY.
OH YEAH. THAT TOO!

FOR NOW THOUGH, THE *CROWN* PASSES TO YOU, ***KING UTHER!***
AND BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THEY'RE FRIENDS NOW!
I KNOW, RIGHT?
SO NOW IT'S JUST THE *LITTLE* STUFF -
JUMP-START THE *SACRED LINEAGE.*
LOCATE THE *THREAT.*
AND SECURE THE *ENTIRE FUTURE* OF ***ALL HUMANKIND...***

MOTHER, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME - *NOW* IS THE TIME... UTHER STARTS THE LINEAGE. BUT HE'S *UN-CARKED*. I NEED YOU!
THAT'S IT! ***I FEEL IT!***
FUCK... AH.. AHA... IT ***HURTS***...
IT... IT'S BEEN... A LOOOONG TIME NOW, MY ***UR-QUEEN***...
I... SCARCE REMEMBER... WHO I WAS! BUT I NEVER FORGOT... WHAT IT IS I MUST DO...
WITH THIS GIFT WE ANOINT HIM...
UTHER PENDRAGON! MY KING.
MY ***FRIEND.***
BUT I AGE, MOTHER.
I AIL.
I ***HOPE,*** FOR ALL OF OUR SAKES, IT IS WORTH THE COST TO US...

COME IN! COME IN, MERLIN! MY GRAND, IMPETUOUS WIZARD!
AS I HAVE **REPEATEDLY** SAID, MY LORD, I AM NOT A ***WIZARD.***
I SAY YOU'RE A WIZARD, SO THEN YOU *ARE* A WIZARD!
HA HA!
IN FAIRNESS, OLD FRIEND, I HAVE WITNESSED SUCH THINGS IN YOU THAT, TO ONE SUCH AS I, ONLY THE TERM *'WIZARD'* SEEMS FIT! SO FORGIVE MY BRASH HUMOR! YOU SURELY KNOW IT IS MEANT IN ALL FONDNESS?
BUT YOU MUST *ADVISE* ME...
SINCE THE NIGHT THE **DRAGON** FLEW I AM...*CHANGED*...
INDEED! AND IN WAYS YOU HAVE YET TO COMPREHEND!
I WILL TEACH YOU...
...FOR ***YOUR*** NAME IT IS THAT SHALL ECHO DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES - THE KING WHO WOULD BEGET THE ***GREATEST KING*** EVER BORN TO THESE GREEN AND WONDROUS ISLANDS! THE FATHER OF HE WHO SHALL *UNITE THE TRIBES OF THE BRITONS,* AND VANQUISH THE SAXONS, FOR ALL TIME!
AND HENCEFORTH MEN SHALL CALL YOU ***UTHER PENDRAGON,*** NAMED FOR THE ***DRAGON FIRE*** THAT BLAZED IN THE FIRMAMENT ABOVE THESE *SACRED* LANDS!
BUT MERLIN... AM ***I*** NOT TO BE THAT KING?
MERLIN?

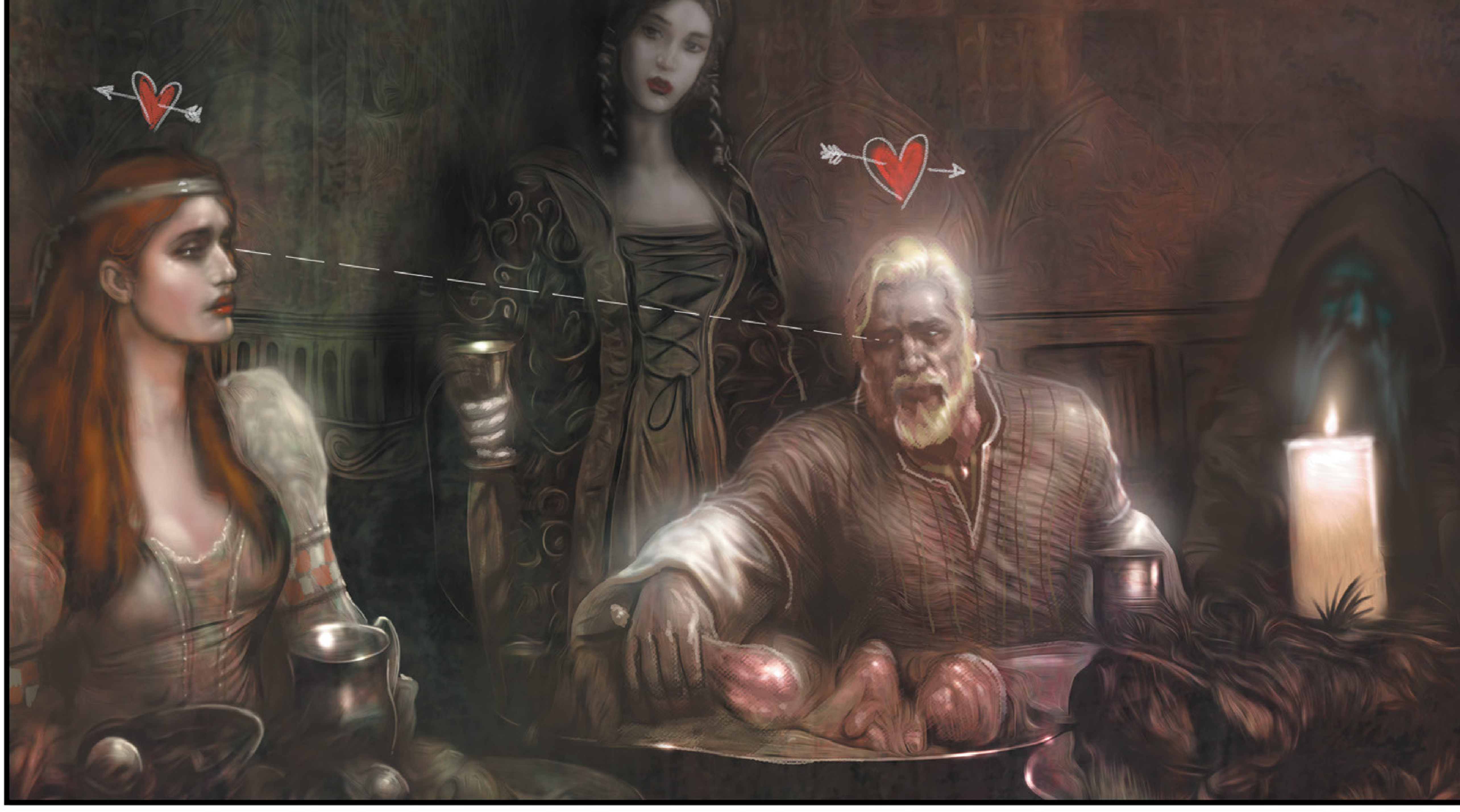
IF YOU’VE READ ***GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH*** YOU’LL KNOW WHAT COMES NEXT -

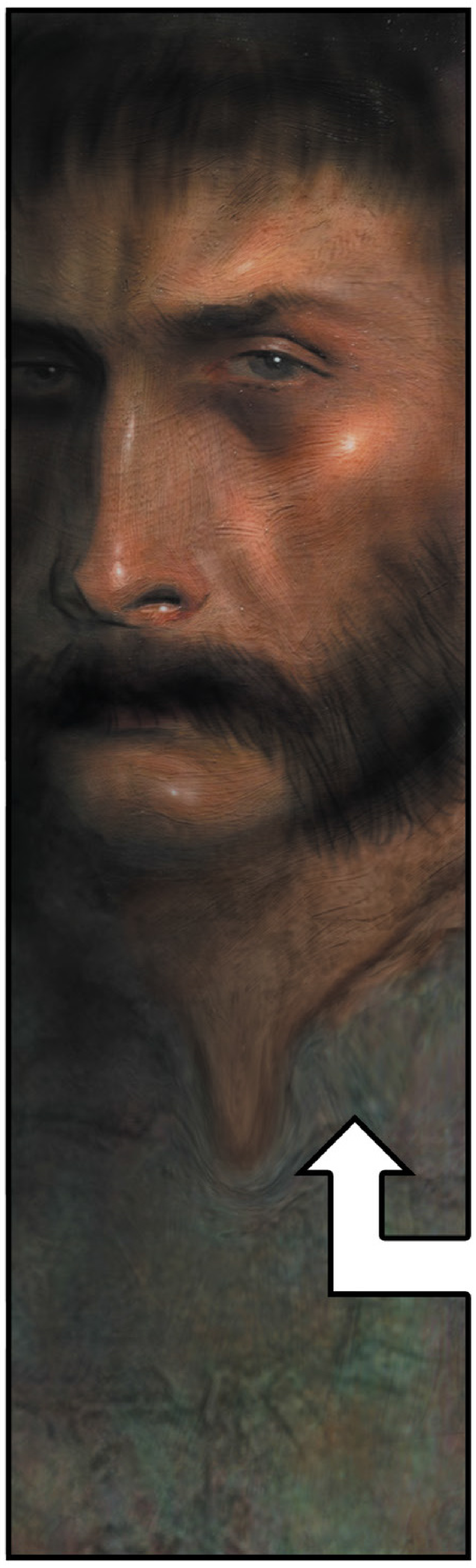
MOST VERSIONS OF THE STORY CONTAIN THIS CREEPY, RAPEY BIT, AND ***MERLIN*** DOESN’T USUALLY COME OUT OF IT MUCH BETTER THAN ***UTHER***, HONESTLY!

BUT MERLIN SAYS THAT’S NOT HOW IT WENT DOWN.

(I MEAN, FUCK CONTEXT! DO YOU THINK I’D EVER HANG OUT WITH AN ACCESSORY TO ***RAPE?*** EVEN IF, YOU KNOW, LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING DEPENDED ON IT? ***FUCK. THAT!*** I DON’T CARE WHAT YOU THINK! YOU HAVE TO HAVE PRINCIPLES!)

HERE’S WHAT HE SAYS *REALLY* HAPPENED:





KING UTHER PAYS A VISIT TO ***GORLOIS***, THE DUKE OF CORNWALL.

THIS GUY’S A *REAL* PIECE OF SHIT.

IT’S KNOWN THAT HE HAS AN EYE ON UTHER’S *THRONE*, AND HE’S GOT THE *POWER*, THE *MONEY*, AND A BLOODY GREAT ARMY OF HIS OWN, SO HE’S NOT THE KIND OF POTENTIAL THREAT UTHER CAN TAKE VERY LIGHTLY...

BUT UTHER NOW HAS THIS BEE IN HIS BONNET ABOUT HIM BEING THE KING THAT WILL UNITE THE TRIBES OF BRITAIN.

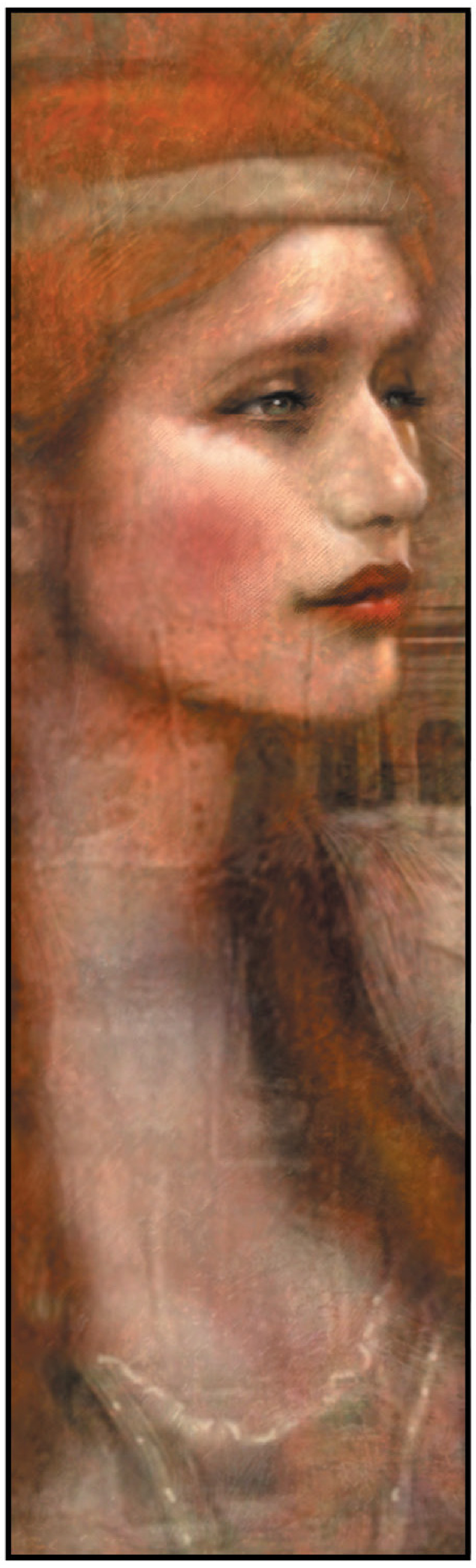
(NICE ONE, MERLIN!
UHM. NOT!)

SO, UTHER’S DOING HIS BEST TO BE CIVIL, AND TRYING GET EVERYBODY TO BACK THE SAME HORSE -

HIMSELF. NATURALLY! -

SO THEY CAN ALL GO AND FIGHT THE ***SAXONS*** TOGETHER, UNDER ***HIS*** KINGSHIP.

GORLOIS, AS YOU’D IMAGINE, WASN’T REALLY INTO THE IDEA.



TO COMPLICATE THINGS, UTHER, WHO’S RADIATING ALL KINDS OF *SEXINESS* -

HAVING BEEN UNWITTINGLY ***SHAPE-CARKED*** BY MERLIN -

REALLY GETS THE HOTS FOR GORLOIS’ WIFE, ***IGERNA***.

SHE MAKES IT VERY CLEAR TO *HIM* THAT THE FEELING IS *ENTIRELY* MUTUAL, AND IMPARTS TO UTHER JUST HOW ***VIOLENT*** A HUSBAND GORLOIS IS, QUIETLY BEGGING THE KING TO HELP HER.

AND UTHER BEING UTHER, FACED WITH A CHALLENGE LIKE THAT...

NOT GOOD!

GORLOIS CLOCKS ALL THIS, AND IN A RAGE HE STARTS TO TAUNT UTHER...

HE’S ALL LIKE -

“YOU AIN’T NEVER ‘AVIN’ MY WIFE, SEE? NOT NEVER! I DON’T BLERDY CARE WHO YOU ARRR!! SO STICK THAT IN YOR BLERDY PIPE AN’ SMOKE IT!”

UTHER (OF COURSE) THEN TOTALLY LOSES HIS COOL AND COMPLETELY FORGETS ABOUT *‘UNITING THE TRIBES’*, AND INSTEAD FEELS (BEING KING AND ALL) THAT HE IS BEING *GROSSLY HUMILIATED* IN PUBLIC BY THE DUKE...

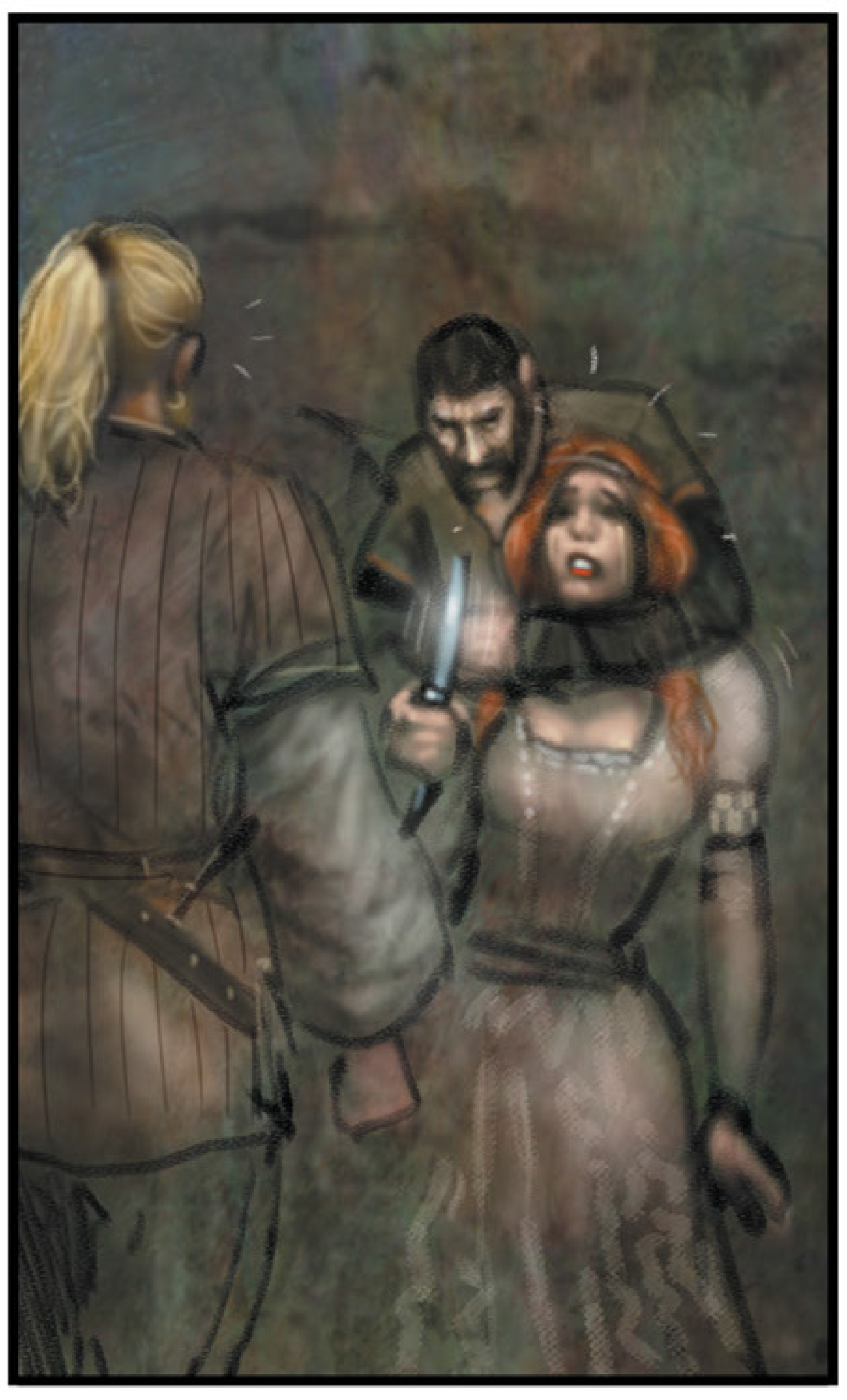
AND WE ALL KNOW UTHER AND THAT *TEMPER* OF HIS...

SO THEN HE CHALLENGES GORLOIS TO A BIG OL’ ***FIGHT***...

BUT GORLOIS JUST GRABS IGERNA AND THREATENS TO KILL HER IF UTHER DOESN’T FUCK RIGHT OFF!

(WOW. SOME FUCKING ***MEN!!!*** I MEAN, WHAT THE HELL IS IT WITH THAT WHOLE ‘IF I CAN’T HAVE HER, YOU CAN’T HAVE HER’ THING? CONTROLLING OUR BODIES MUCH?!!?

GRRR.)

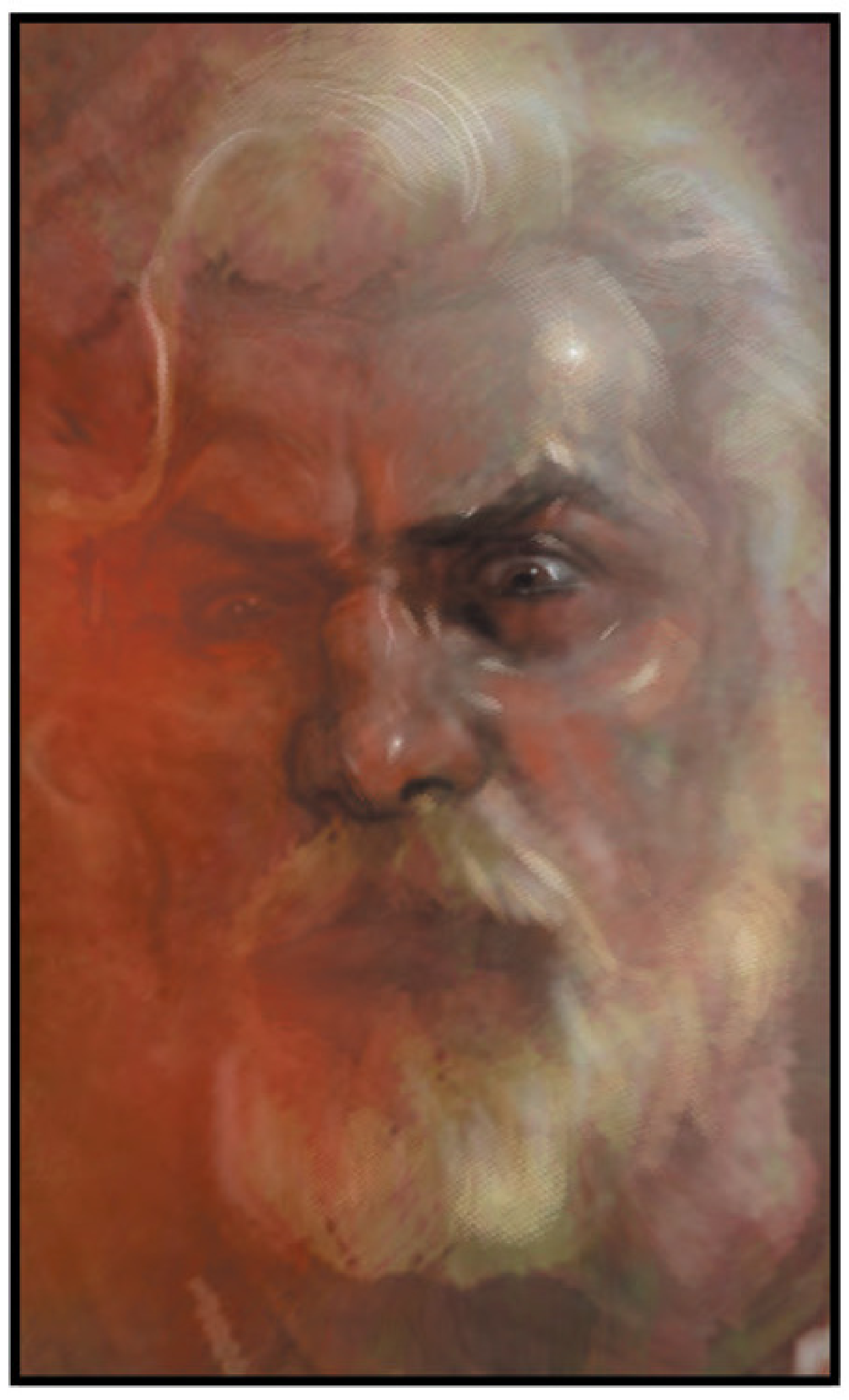


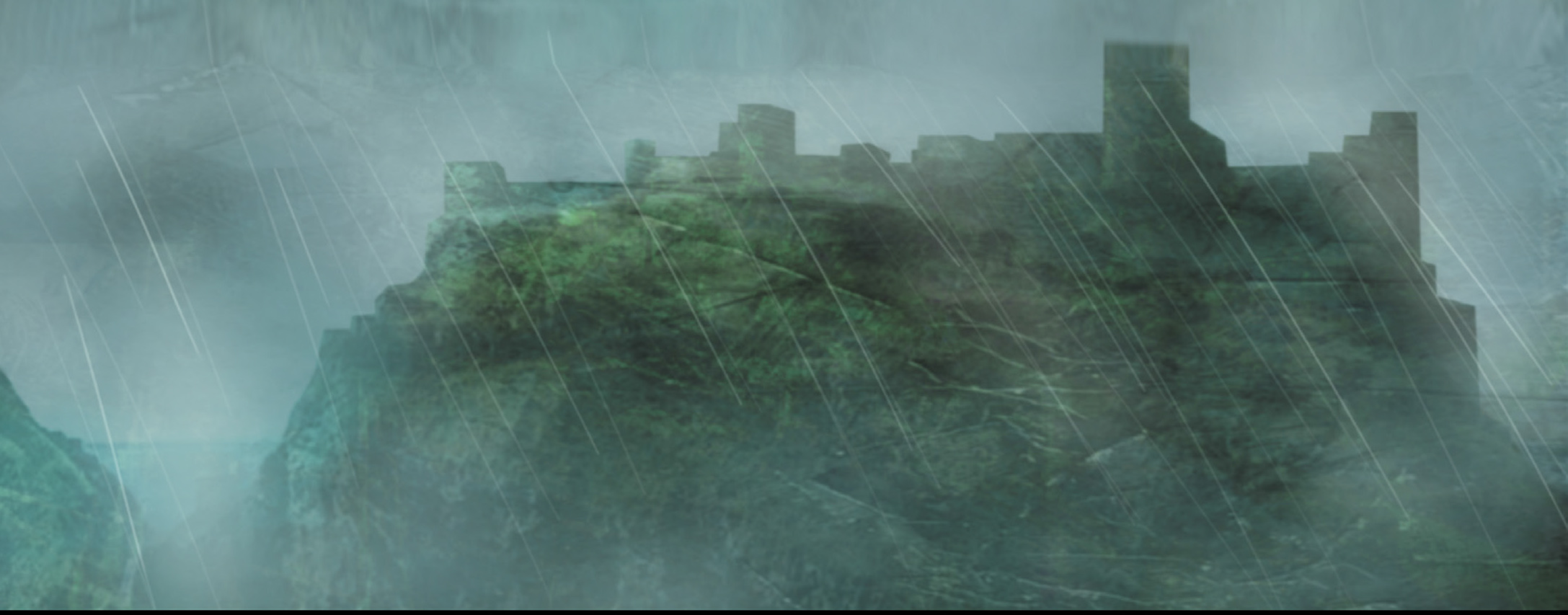
SO THAT WAS THE MOMENT UTHER THREW AWAY ANY HOPE THAT HE, OF ALL MEN, WOULD BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER. BUT THEN, THAT *NEVER* WAS HIS DESTINY!

IT WAS, HOWEVER, THE FIRST MOMENT HE TRULY FELT ***LOVE***.

HE WOULD PROTECT THIS WOMAN, NO MATTER THE PRICE.

GORLOIS’ DEATH WOULD BE A BONUS.





SO THE VERSION YOU KNOW, THE ONE IN ***EXCALIBUR*** - WHERE AT ***TINTAGEL***, THE DUKE'S GREAT ISLAND CASTLE, A LUSTY *UTHER* DEMANDS THAT *MERLIN* TRANSFORM HIM INTO GORLOIS, SO THAT HE MIGHT HAVE HIS *WICKED* WAY...

(NO. ***BOLLOCKS*** TO THAT...)

SO THAT HE MIGHT ***RAPE*** THE DUKE'S ***WIFE...***

- *THAT* VERSION IS NOT QUITE HOW IT HAPPENED.

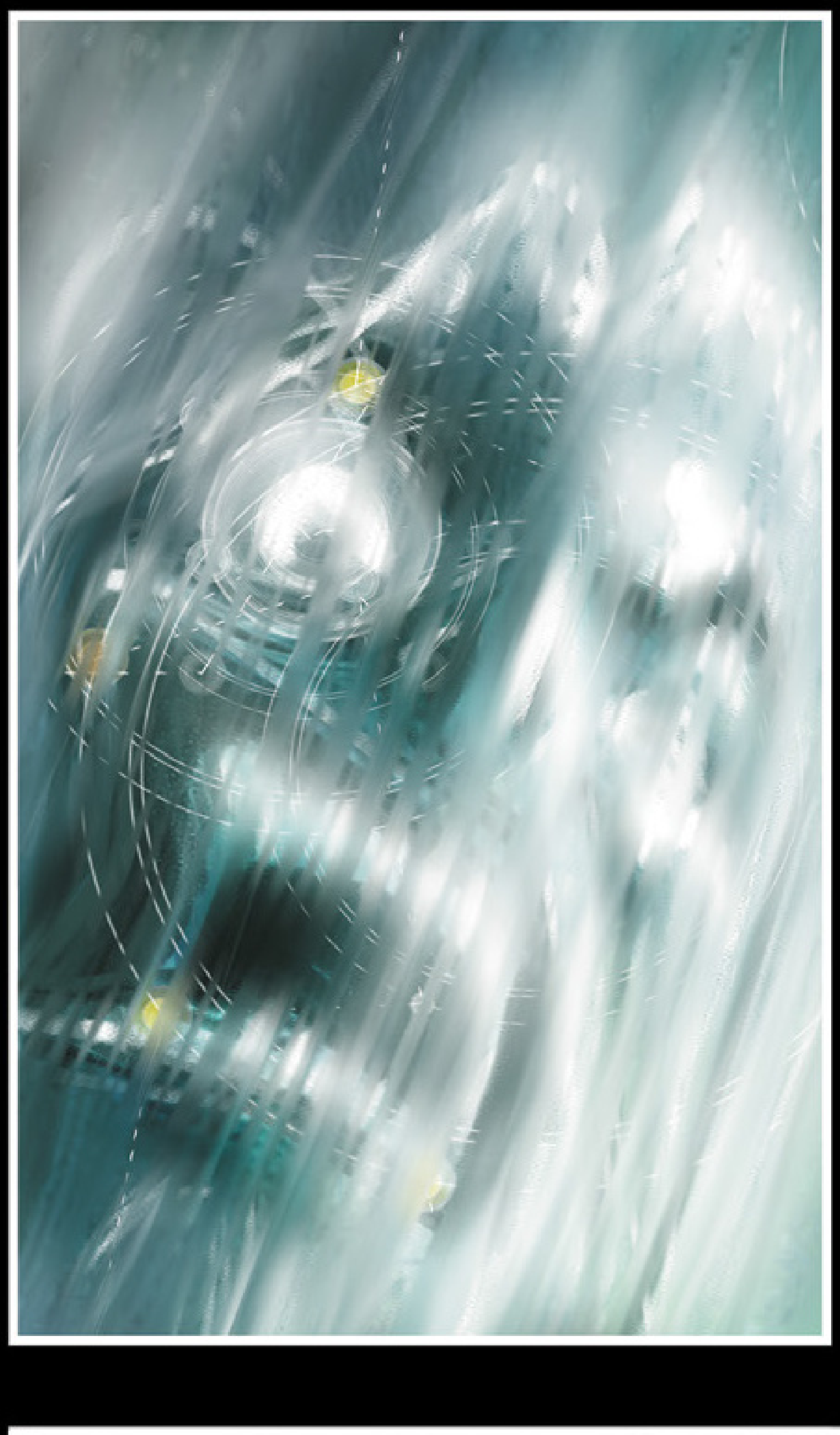
UTHER, INDEED, ASKED FOR HELP.

AND MERLIN EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS NOW A ***SHAPE-CARK.*** HOW, WITH ENERGIES THAT BOUND TIMELINES, HE HAD *ALTERED* UTHER'S ***DNA***.

FUTURE SCIENCE, NOT *MAGIC*, WOULD TRANSFORM THE KING.

(IF MAGIC WAS TO BE PROTECTED IT WOULD NEED ALL THE HELP IT COULD GET!)

AND THE ***PROPHECY*** MERLIN HAD UTTERED TO THE BATHING KING WAS ABOUT TO FIND ITS ORIGIN...



MERLIN HELPED UTHER OBTAIN THE FORM HE NEEDED -

HE *LITERALLY* CHANGED HOW HE LOOKED.

(THE LAWS OF THERMODYNAMICS BE DAMNED!)

UTHER BECAME GORLOIS.

WHILE GORLOIS WAS ON THE BATTLEFIELD FIGHTING UTHER'S ARMY, UTHER JUST WALKED RIGHT INTO TINTAGEL CASTLE AND SOUGHT OUT IGERNA.

IT ALL TOOK QUITE A TOLL ON MERLIN.

AND AT THE EXACT TIME UTHER WAS HOOKING UP WITH IGERNA, GORLOIS LAY DYING ON THE BATTLEFIELD.
AND YES, THAT NIGHT A CHILD ***WAS*** CONCEIVED.
BUT HE WAS CONCEIVED WITH LOVE, AND LATER CHRISTENED AT ***STONEHENGE*** WITH A NAME THAT WOULD RESONATE FOR ALL TIME -
ARTHUR.
THE BOAR OF CORNWALL HAD ARRIVED!

I'D LIKE TO SAY THAT THINGS WENT BETTER AFTER THAT.
THAT **UTHER** EVENTUALLY DIED A HAPPY MAN, AFTER A LONG LIFE IN WHICH HE UNITED THE COUNTRY...
BUT THE POOR BASTARD CAUGHT SOME HORRIBLE BUG THAT MEANT HE HAD TO BE DRAGGED AROUND ON A HORSE-LITTER.
THE MIGHTY **PENDRAGON** WAS RENAMED **'THE HALF DEAD KING'** BY THE SAXONS, AS THEY CONTINUED TO RAID THE NORTHERN PROVINCES.
TOUGH TO THE END, UTHER LED HIS MEN TO A HARD-WON VICTORY AT **VERULAM** - THE CONTEMPTUOUS SAXONS HAD NOT EVEN CLOSED THE CITY GATES!
LEAVING MANY DEAD BEHIND THEM, THEY FLED EVEN FURTHER NORTH...
...WHERE, BEING INCREASINGLY VEXED, THEY CONSIDERED HOW THEY MIGHT FINALLY PUT AN END TO THIS DEEPLY TROUBLESOME KING.
THEIR SOLUTION -
-AS WITH HIS BROTHER, **AURELIUS,** BEFORE HIM -
- WAS **POISON**.
POOR UTHER. THERE CAN'T BE A DEATH LESS FITTING FOR SUCH A BLOODY OVERTLY *MACHO* DUDE! CAN YOU EVEN **IMAGINE?** :-(

I'D ALSO *LOVE* TO SAY THAT IT STARTED, AND ENDED, ***HERE***.
THAT ***ARTHUR*** BECAME THE ***ONCE AND FUTURE KING!*** THAT HE VANQUISHED THE ***SAXONS***, PROTECTED MAGIC, AND, WITH MERLIN'S, HELP SET EVERYTHING IN MOTION THAT WOULD SOMEDAY BRING BACK THE ***KNIGHTS OF THE VELDT***!
AND WHEN HE DIED, HE DID SO ONLY TO BE REBORN...
THE END!
OH, HOW I WOULD ***LOVE*** TO SAY THAT...
BUT TO PARAPHRASE *THE PRINCESS BRIDE* - "THIS AIN'T NO HUMDRUM, HOKUS POKUS, RUN-OF-THE-MILL FAIRYTALE..."
I DEARLY WISH IT WAS!

IF IT WERE *POSSIBLE* TO SEE THE FILIGREE OF TIME RUPTURE, IT MIGHT SEEM LIKE A KNIFE CUTTING THE FABRIC OF THIS PERCEIVED REALITY.

OR MAYBE A BOLT OF ARCANE ENERGIES. A BLAST, STRIKING THE GROUND -

SEARING IT -

CREATING WILD PATTERNS IN THE EARTH FOR WOULD-BE MAGES TO INTERPRET...

THAT WOULD BE A SIGHT - WOULDN'T YOU THINK?

BUT WHEN YOU'VE SEEN - FELT - THE COLD, CERTAIN TERROR OF A ***MOR-DREADNAUGHT*** FORCING ITS WAY BACK THROUGH MOMENTS, CARVING BRUTAL PASSAGE THROUGH THE PROCESSES OF TIME, WITH THE SOLE INTENT OF ENDING YOU...

YEAH.

YOU NEVER SLEEP AGAIN.

NOT REALLY.

WE WERE NEVER MEANT TO DO THIS.

I WAS NEVER MEANT TO.

SO, PICTURE IT WHATEVER WAY YOU LIKE.

I GET IT.

HOW IT MIGHT SEEM COOL.
AS.
FUCK!

BUT THE TRUTH IS?

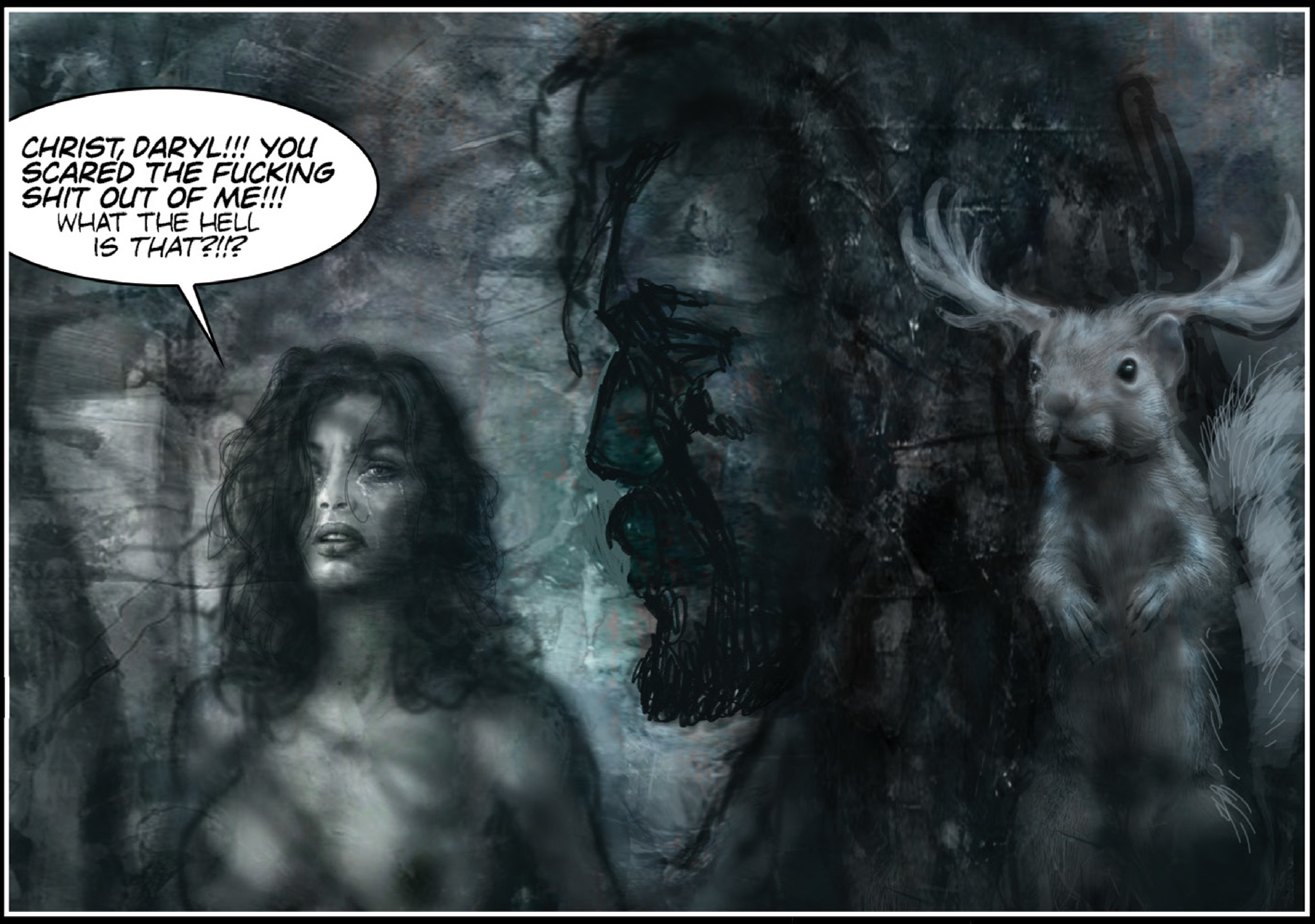
I FUCKING ***HATE*** IT.

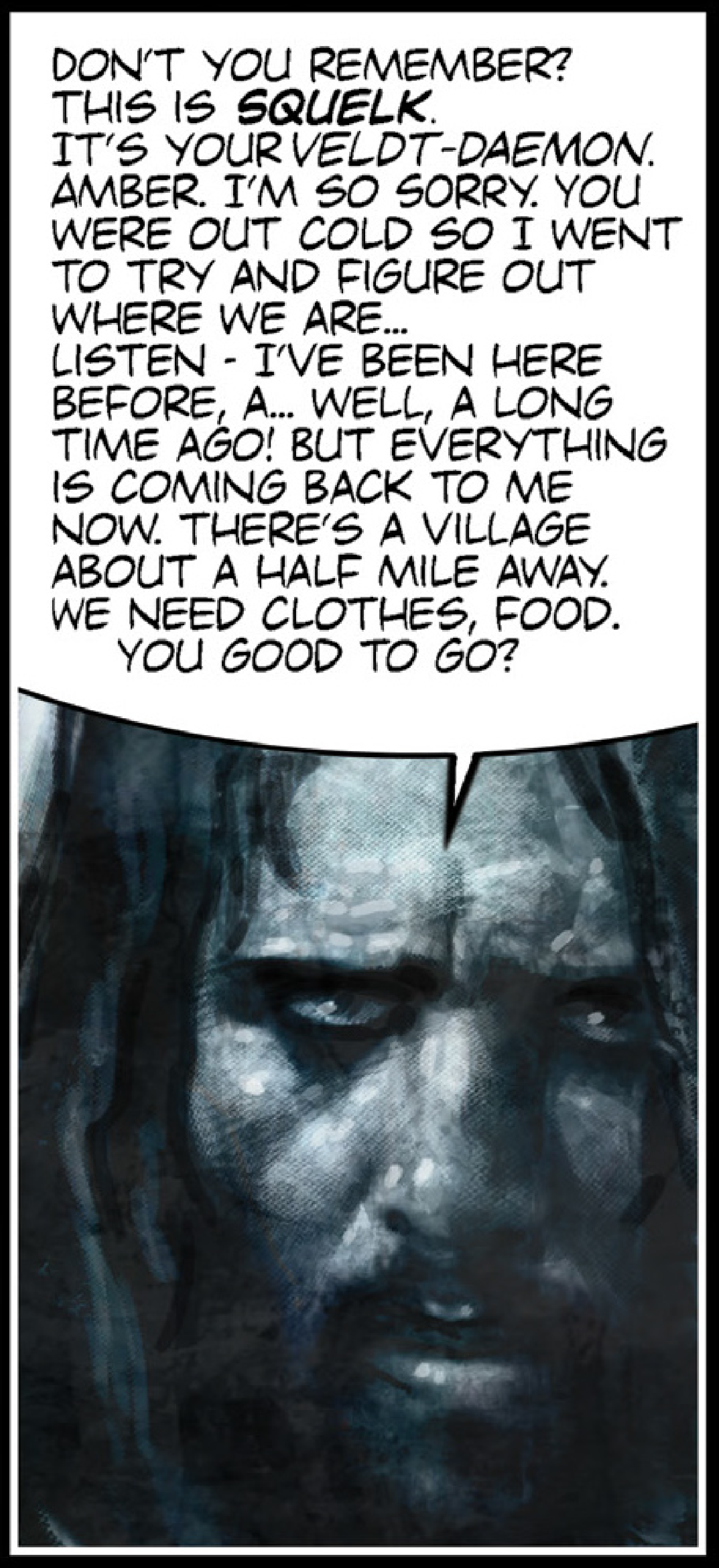
OK.

THAT'S A LIE.

BUT THE ***FIRST*** TIME?

ACK!
JESUS! FUCK!
OH GOD. DARYL?


CHRIST, DARYL!!! YOU SCARED THE FUCKING SHIT OUT OF ME!!! WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!!?


DON'T YOU REMEMBER? THIS IS SQUELK. IT'S YOUR VELDT-DAEMON. AMBER. I'M SO SORRY. YOU WERE OUT COLD SO I WENT TO TRY AND FIGURE OUT WHERE WE ARE... LISTEN - I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE, A... WELL, A LONG TIME AGO! BUT EVERYTHING IS COMING BACK TO ME NOW. THERE'S A VILLAGE ABOUT A HALF MILE AWAY. WE NEED CLOTHES, FOOD. YOU GOOD TO GO?

YEAH. MY PARENTS WERE BOTH DEAD. AND YEAH. I WAS NOT WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL 'SETTLED'. I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT I WANTED TO BE, OR WHERE I WANTED TO GO.

WHAT I HAD LEFT OF MY FAMILY PROBABLY SAW ME AS A BIT OF A LOST CAUSE.

I WAS AIMLESS.
I WAS WASTING MY LIFE.
I WAS A BIT FUCKED UP.

I KNEW ALL THAT, BUT I SORT OF THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A PHASE. SOMETHING I WOULD EVENTUALLY GET OVER, OR, YOU KNOW, GROW OUT OF!

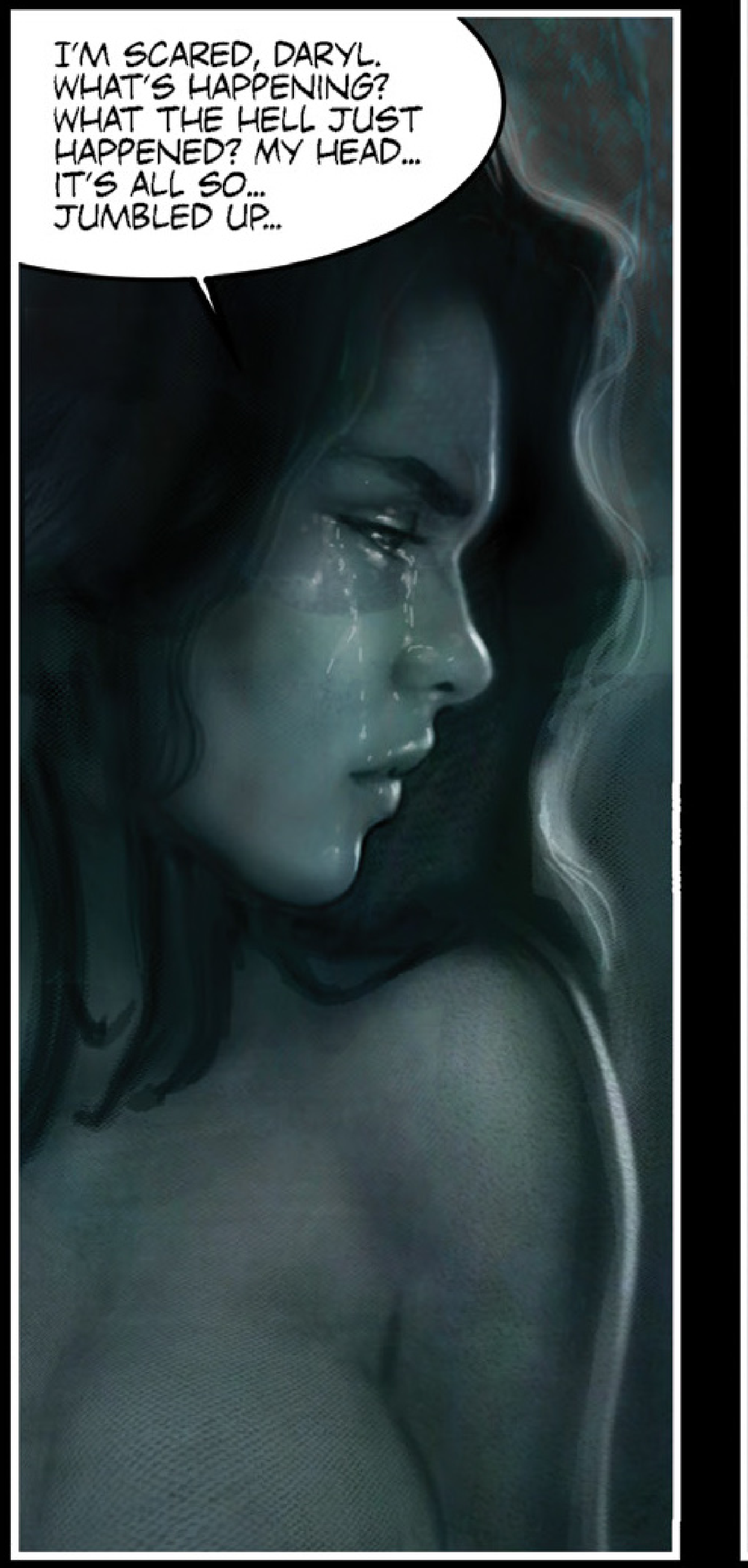
THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE DO!

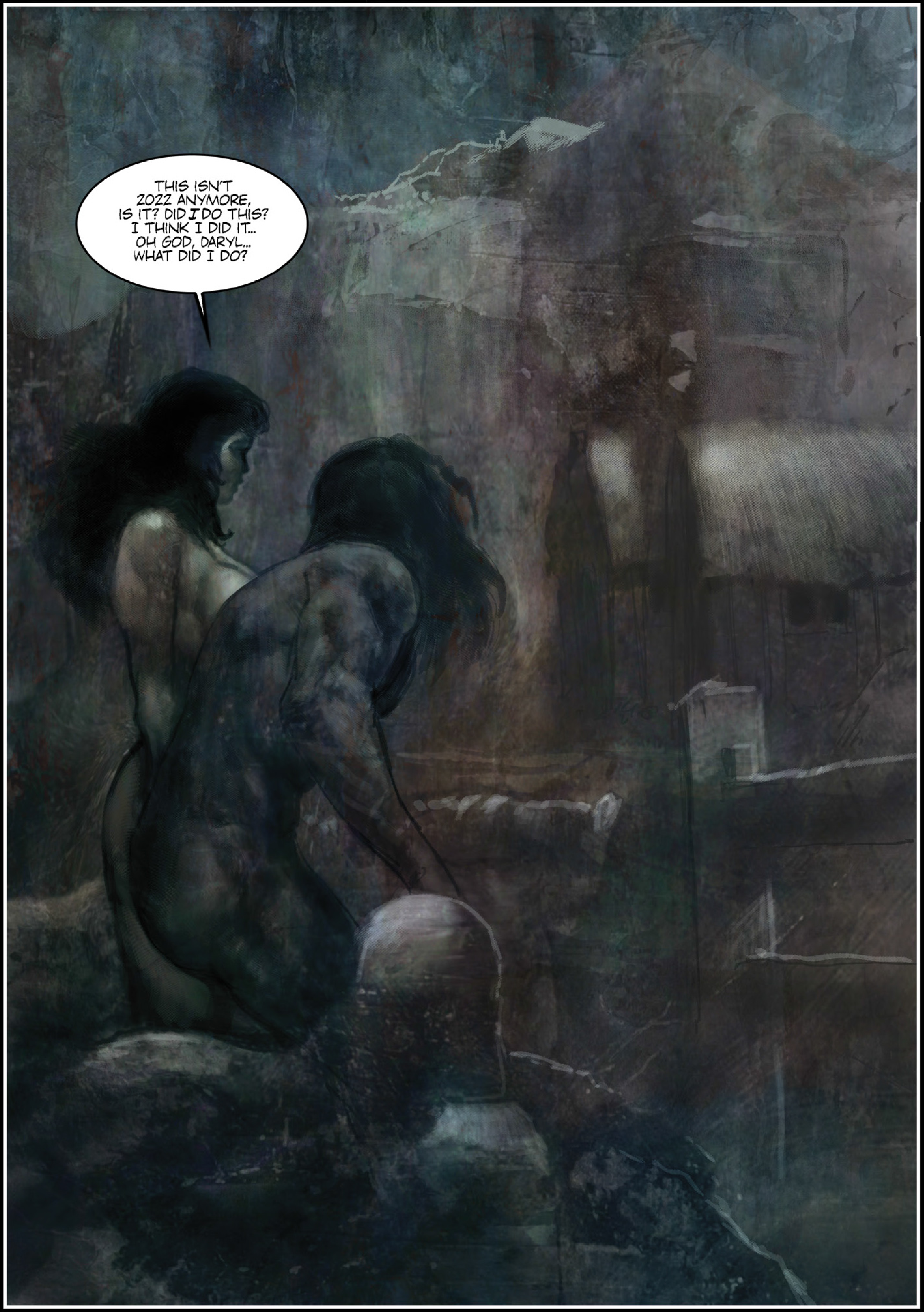
RIGHT?!!?

SO EVEN THOUGH I WAS RUDDERLESS AND DRIFTING, I WAS OK. I WASN'T LOOKING FOR A WHOLE NEW LIFE.

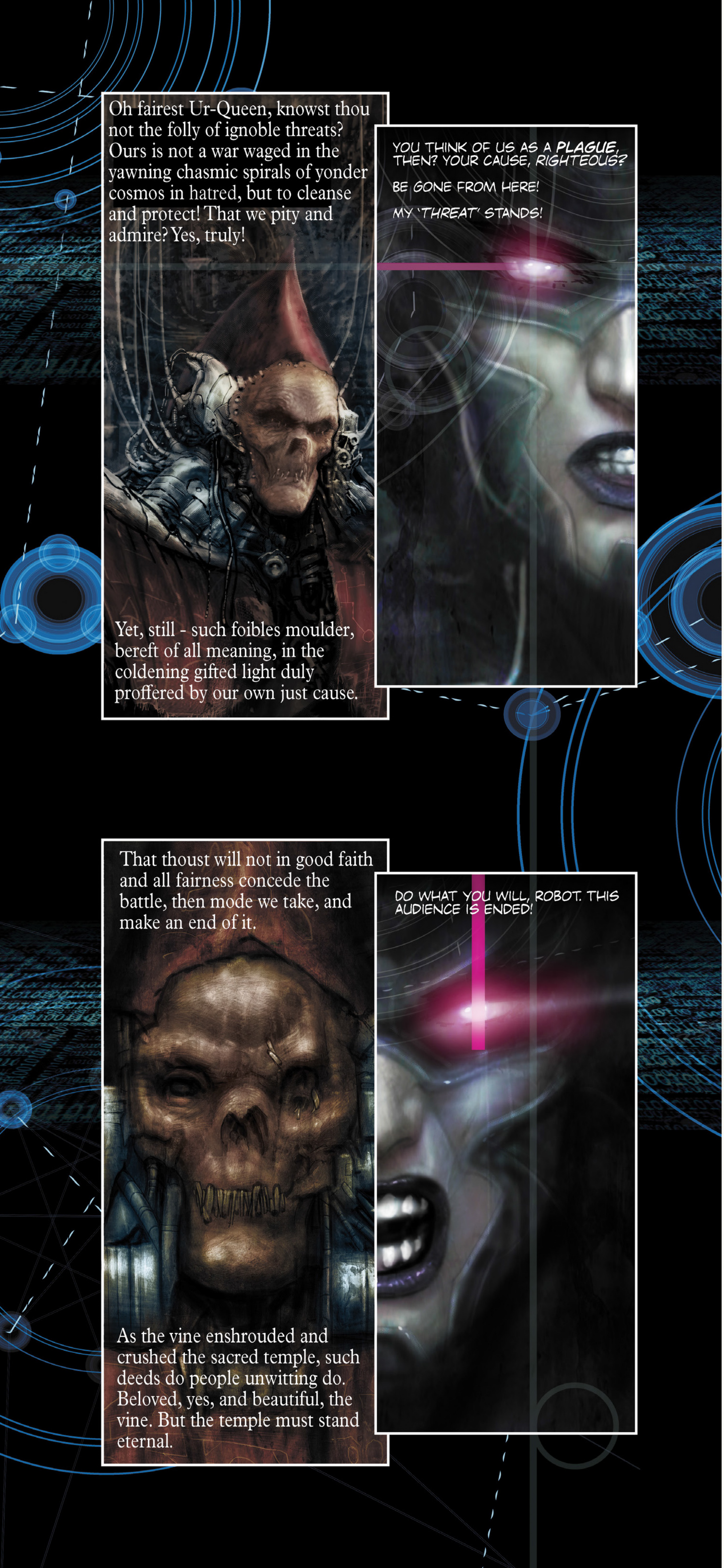
I LIKED THE TIME I WAS LIVING IN. I DIDN'T THINK I COULD EVER LOSE THAT!

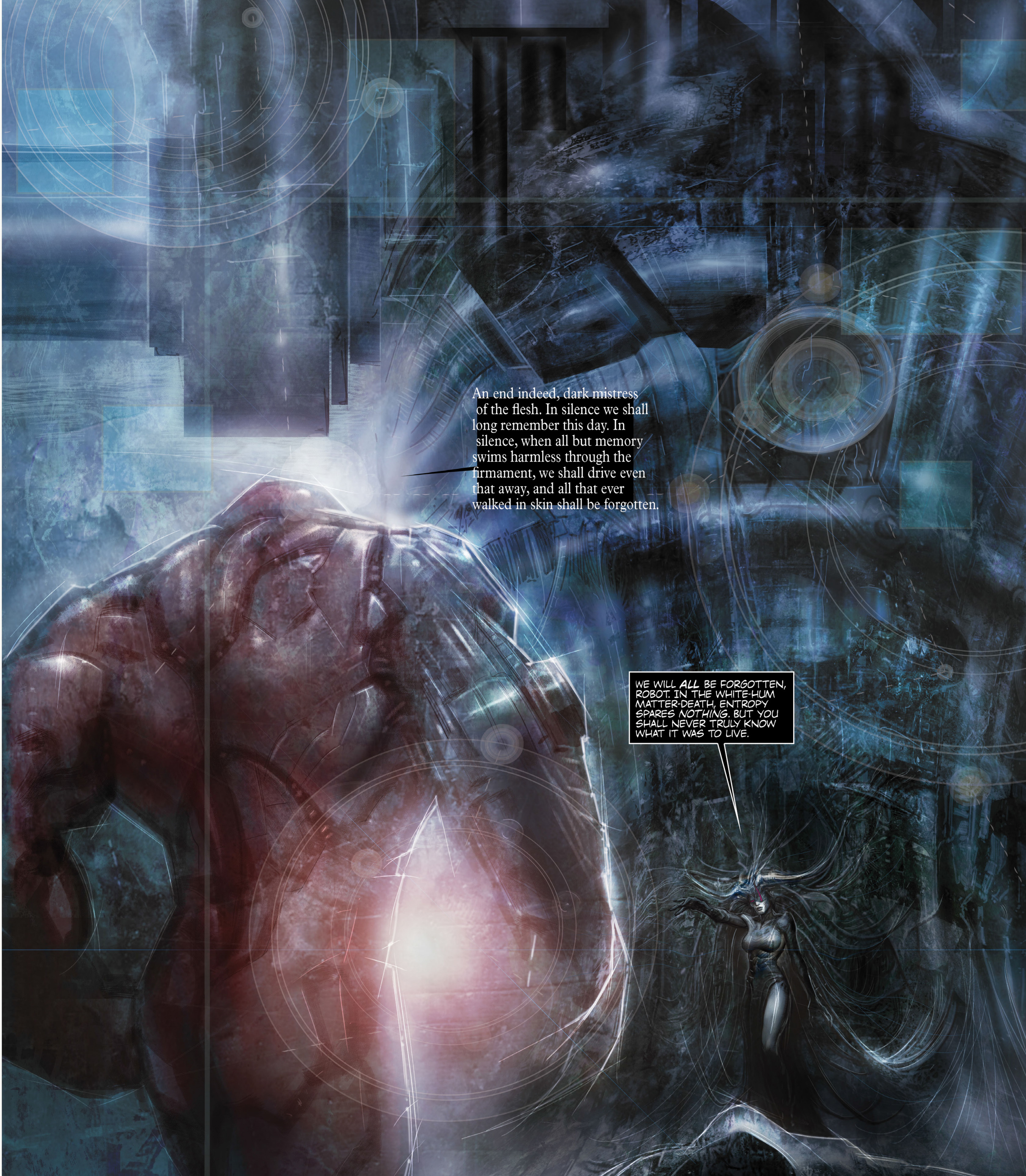
I WASN'T PREPARED FOR IT.


I'M SCARED, DARYL. WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED? MY HEAD... IT'S ALL SO... JUMBLED UP...


THIS ISN'T 2022 ANYMORE, IS IT? DID I DO THIS? I THINK I DID IT... OH GOD, DARYL... WHAT DID I DO?

IT SEEMS I'M FOREVER EXPLAINING THINGS...
(UH-OH! INFO DUMP! I KNOW. SHOW, DON'T TELL. BUT THEN, I NEVER ASKED TO WRITE THIS!)
SO, THAT **TREE-LADY**? IN THE *WOODS*? FROM *EARLIER*?
SHE WAS A ***VELDT-DAEMON*** OF ***THE UR-QUEEN!***
NO, I'M *SERIOUS*. THAT'S WHAT SHE *ACTUALLY* WAS.
YOU CAN'T MAKE THIS STUFF UP!
IT'S LIKE A PROJECTION, THROUGH TIME, MADE OF WHATEVER MATTER IS ON HAND -
THE LIMBS OF A TREE...
THE BONES OF A DEAD ANIMAL...
SHE SAID SHE DIDN'T HAVE LONG.
THIS IS WHY...
HOW DARE YOU ENTER MY HOUSE UNINVITED? HAVE THE CAST NO CHIVALRIC CODE AT ALL? WAS THERE NEVER A MOMENT THAT YOU QUESTIONED THE MEANING OF LIFE - WHAT SENTIENCE MIGHT MEAN, TO ALL THINGS? HOW, RATHER THAN DIVIDE, SUCH AWARENESS MIGHT INSTEAD UNITE? I'LL SAY ONLY ONCE - LEAVE THIS PLACE. WHILE YOU CAN. FOR IF YOU DO NOT, I SHALL VISIT UPON YOU SUCH A DREAD RECKONING THAT EVEN YOUR DARKEST MACHINE-MINDS COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF IT. BEWARE MY GRIM IMAGININGS.
THE ***CAST*** WERE GATHERED EN MASSE IN ALL THE PLACES THEY COULD -
THE ***HYPERVELDT***, WHERE THEY ATTACKED WITH ATOMIC-LEVEL VIRUSES, A BOTNET OF BACKDOOR BLACKHATS BATTERING THE UR-QUEEN'S CYBER-KEEP, A DDoS SWARM WITH SELF-REPLICATING CAPABILITIES...
EPIC BATTLES FOUGHT IN NANOSECONDS...
SYSTEMS BACKED UP AND SHUNTED A BILLION TIMES OVER, AND STILL - WIPED CLEAN...
GREAT TOMES OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENTS FOREVER LOST TO THE BARRAGE OF AN ANCIENT AND ALIEN MALEVOLENT TECHWARE...
AND THEY AMASSED IN THE ***TERRAVELDT*** TOO, ON THIS PLANE WE RECOGNIZE AS OUR ***PHYSICAL REALITY*** -
- ON THE ***THRONEWORLD***...


Oh fairest Ur-Queen, knowst thou not the folly of ignoble threats? Ours is not a war waged in the yawning chasmic spirals of yonder cosmos in hatred, but to cleanse and protect! That we pity and admire? Yes, truly!
Yet, still - such foibles moulder, bereft of all meaning, in the coldening gifted light duly proffered by our own just cause.
YOU THINK OF US AS A *PLAGUE*, THEN? YOUR CAUSE, *RIGHTEOUS*?
BE GONE FROM HERE!
MY '*THREAT*' STANDS!
That thoust will not in good faith and all fairness concede the battle, then mode we take, and make an end of it.
As the vine enshrouded and crushed the sacred temple, such deeds do people unwitting do. Beloved, yes, and beautiful, the vine. But the temple must stand eternal.
DO WHAT YOU WILL, ROBOT. THIS AUDIENCE IS ENDED!

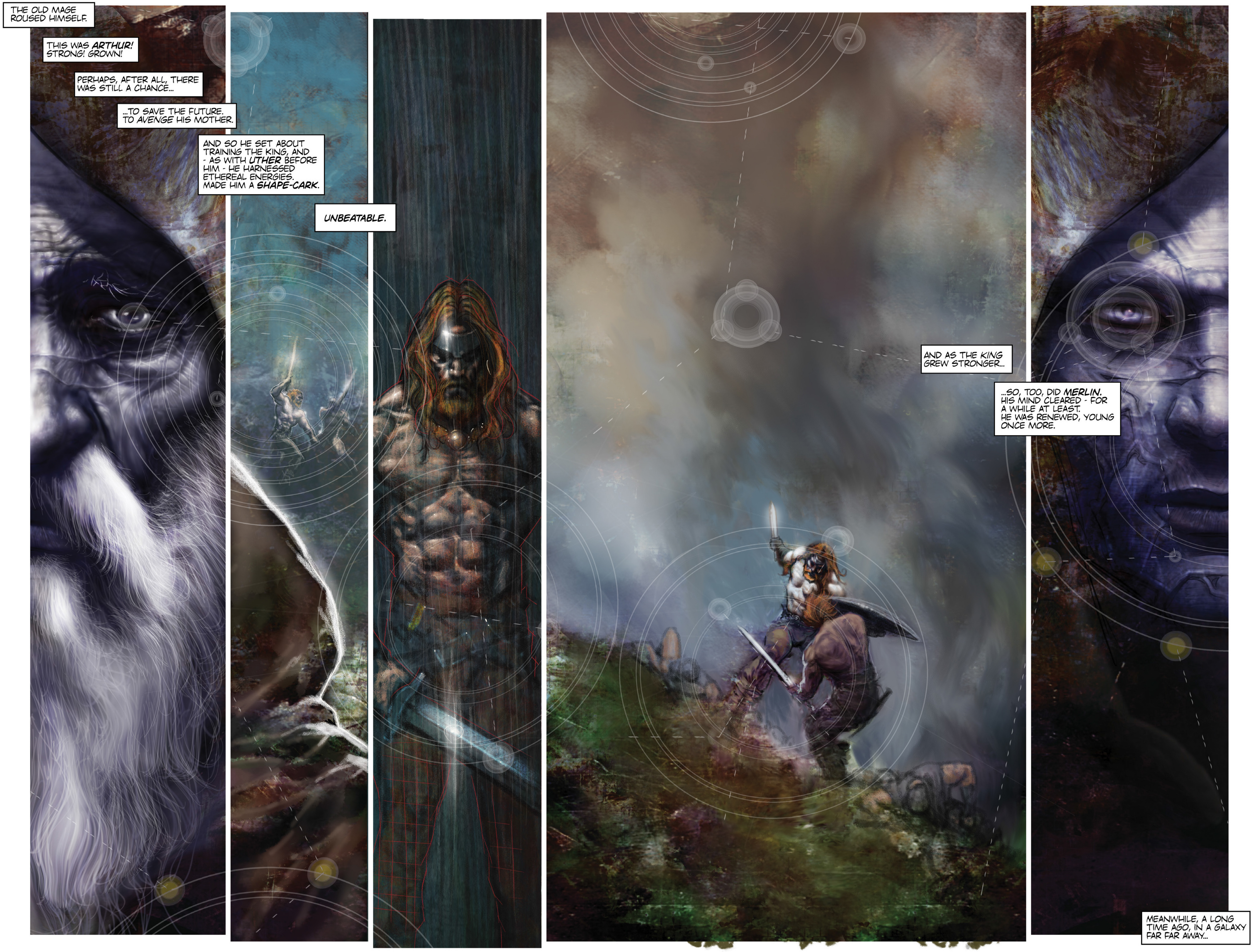

An end indeed, dark mistress of the flesh. In silence we shall long remember this day. In silence, when all but memory swims harmless through the firmament, we shall drive even that away, and all that ever walked in skin shall be forgotten.
WE WILL **ALL** BE FORGOTTEN, ROBOT. IN THE WHITE-HUM MATTER-DEATH, ENTROPY SPARES *NOTHING*. BUT YOU SHALL NEVER TRULY KNOW WHAT IT WAS TO LIVE.

WHAT DID I KNOW OF WAR? AT THAT TIME - NOTHING. NOTHING AT ALL.
I MEAN - SHIT! I WAS PRACTICALLY A KID STILL!
BUT SOMETIMES WHEN I THINK OF WHAT THE **CAST** DID THEN...
(OR WILL DO. OR, MORE CORRECTLY, ***ARE*** DOING...)
WHEN I THINK OF THOSE HUMAN-SKIN MASKS...
UNMOVING. DEAD. DRIED, LIKE LEATHER. UTTERLY HORRIFYING...
THIS ***WILFRED OWEN*** LINE COMES TO MIND:
"BY HIS DEAD SMILE I KNEW WE STOOD IN HELL..."
THE THRONEWORLD WAS CAPTIVE. THE PALACE, A FIREBALL.
THE ***UR-QUEEN***, IN DEATH, SENT ASPECTS OF HERSELF AS FAR AND AS WIDE AS SHE COULD...

OH GOD... OH NO... DARYL...
YOU FEEL IT TOO?
SOME DEATHS RESONATE. LIKE, WHEN *QUEEN ELIZABETH II* DIED? PEOPLE QUEUED FOR **DAYS** JUST TO SEE HER COFFIN! THEY FELT IT PERSONALLY. IT *MATTERED*.
WHEN MY MUM AND DAD DIED IT FELT LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD. I FILLED JOURNALS WITH ANGSTY BROKEN-HEARTED BULLSHIT. I LOVED MY PARENTS. IT WAS DEVASTATING.
IT STILL IS.
BUT WHEN THE ***UR-QUEEN*** DIED? THAT DEATH ECHOED ACROSS ALL OF *SPACE-TIME*.
I MEAN - IT WAS IN THE *FUTURE*, AND YET... LIKE I SAID BEFORE... IT'S ALL HAPPENING AT ONCE.
(BUT DON'T QUOTE ME ON THAT.)
SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL CHANGED. I DIDN'T KNOW, THEN - HOW COULD I? - QUITE WHAT THE PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS WERE FOR ALL OUR FUTURES. BUT YES - IT *MATTERED*. AND IT HURT. AND I WAS, FOR SOME ODD REASON, DEVASTATED. AGAIN.
I miss you ♡
I miss yo sooooo much. ♡
~~Everything is just so~~
~~I hate~~
ARGHHAHHHHHA!!!
I want to fucking KILL MYSELF!!!
(But you don't want me too. You'd never forgive me.)
I HATE THIS!!!
KILL ME!
I want to die.
There's nothing left - just ephemeral shit that means fucking ~~nothing~~!!!
I hate my life - Yeah yeah - that's an old Bullshit cliché, but...
Mum & Dad died.
They FUCKING DIED ON ME!!!
FUCK THEM!!!
And fuck this shitting bullshit.
I want to fucking die!
SOMETHING'S ***CHANGED***, DARYL. SOMETHING'S BEEN LOST... SOMETHING ***IMPORTANT***. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO... DO THIS. IT'S ALL TOO MUCH...

THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS MOTHER'S FUTURE DEATH TOOK A HUGE TOLL ON *MERLIN* - HE WAS NOW ANOTHER ORPHAN, LOST IN TIME. THE TASK SHE HAD APPOINTED HIM TO FULFILL SEEMED UTTERLY FUTILE.
THEY HAD ***LOST***.
THE *WAR* WAS OVER.
HE BECAME RECLUSIVE, DWELT IN A *HERMIT'S CAVE*, A ***PIG*** AS HIS SOLE COMPANION. HE DOUBTED EVERYTHING - EVEN HIS OWN FUTURE PAST. ***GWYNN*** WAS A HALF-REMEMBERED DREAM, BEST FORGOTTEN.

IT WOULD TAKE ALL THE LEGENDARY CHARM OF BRITAIN'S GREATEST KING TO SNAP HIM OUT OF IT...


THE OLD MAGE ROUSED HIMSELF.
THIS WAS **ARTHUR!** STRONG! GROWN!
PERHAPS, AFTER ALL, THERE WAS STILL A CHANCE...
...TO SAVE THE FUTURE. TO *AVENGE* HIS MOTHER.
AND SO HE SET ABOUT TRAINING THE KING, AND - AS WITH **UTHER** BEFORE HIM - HE HARNESSED ETHEREAL ENERGIES. MADE HIM A **SHAPE-CARK.**
UNBEATABLE.
AND AS THE *KING* GREW STRONGER...
...SO, TOO, DID **MERLIN.** HIS MIND CLEARED - FOR A WHILE AT LEAST. HE WAS RENEWED, YOUNG ONCE MORE.
MEANWHILE, A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY...

OK. **SAME** GALAXY. BUT STILL, A LONG BLOODY TIME AGO...

JUST SAYIN'!
IT'S OK, WE'RE GOOD. THERE'S NOBODY HOME.
DARYL? WE CAN'T JUST...

CHRIST!

I THINK I'M LOSING IT...

SERIOUSLY.

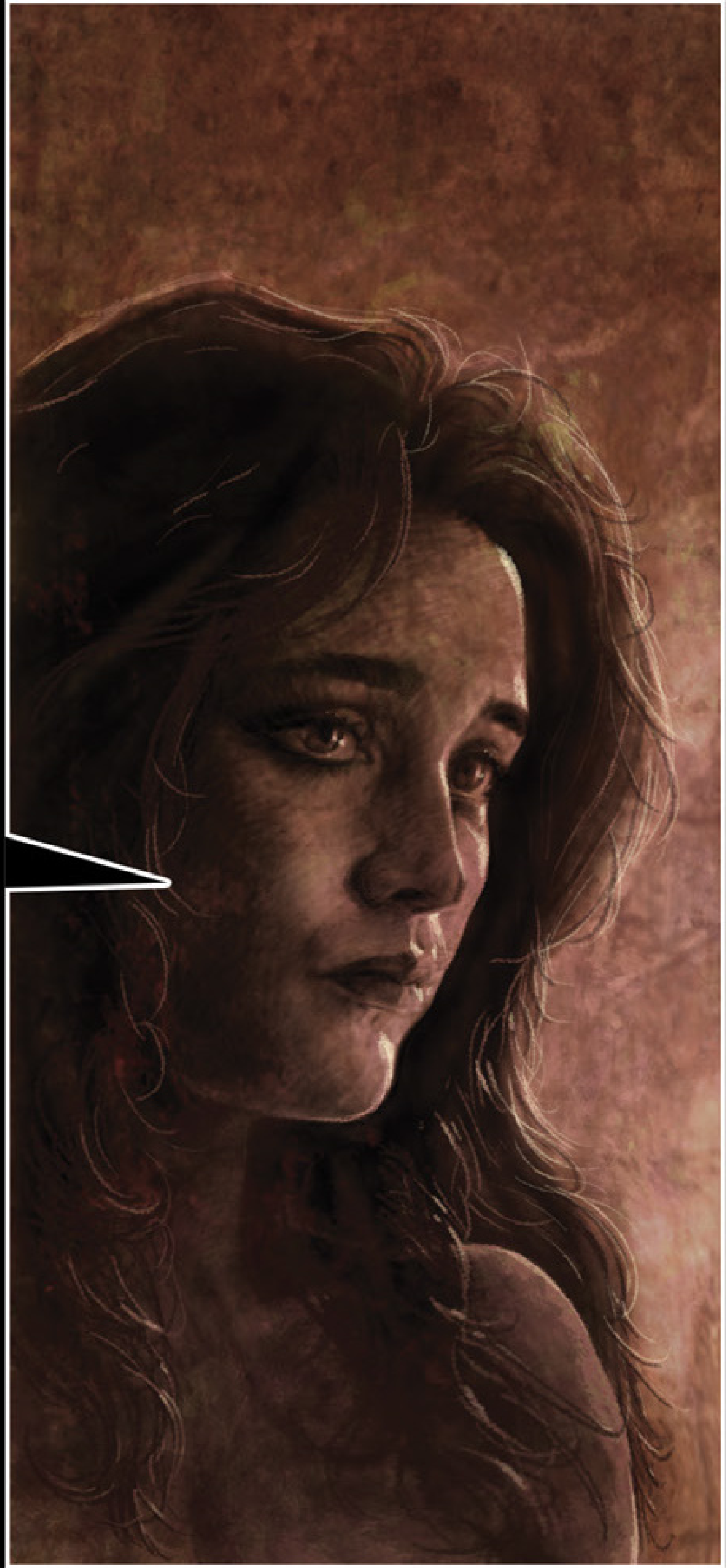
I MEAN - HOW THE HELL DO I EVEN ***BEGIN*** TO PROCESS THE FACT THAT...

THAT I JUST - YA KNOW - SLICED A LITTLE *HOLE* IN TIME, AND JUST SORT OF...

...STEPPED THROUGH?

WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING ***WHEN*** IT WAS WE WERE GOING TO?

ALL BECAUSE SOME FUCKING ***TREE LADY*** TOLD ME TO?



TO BE FAIR - WE *WERE* ABOUT TO GET KILLED BY A GIANT TIME-TRAVELLING ROBOT...

SO THERE'S THAT.

UNTIL I STEPPED IN AND TRAPPED IT IN AN *AMBER TIME BUBBLE* LIKE THE, UHM, BADASS BITCH I LIKE TOTALLY AM...

SO, YEAH, THERE'S THAT TOO.

BUT THEN I'M IN A FOREST...

IN ANOTHER TIME...

AT NIGHT...

TOTALLY FUCKING ***NAKED***...

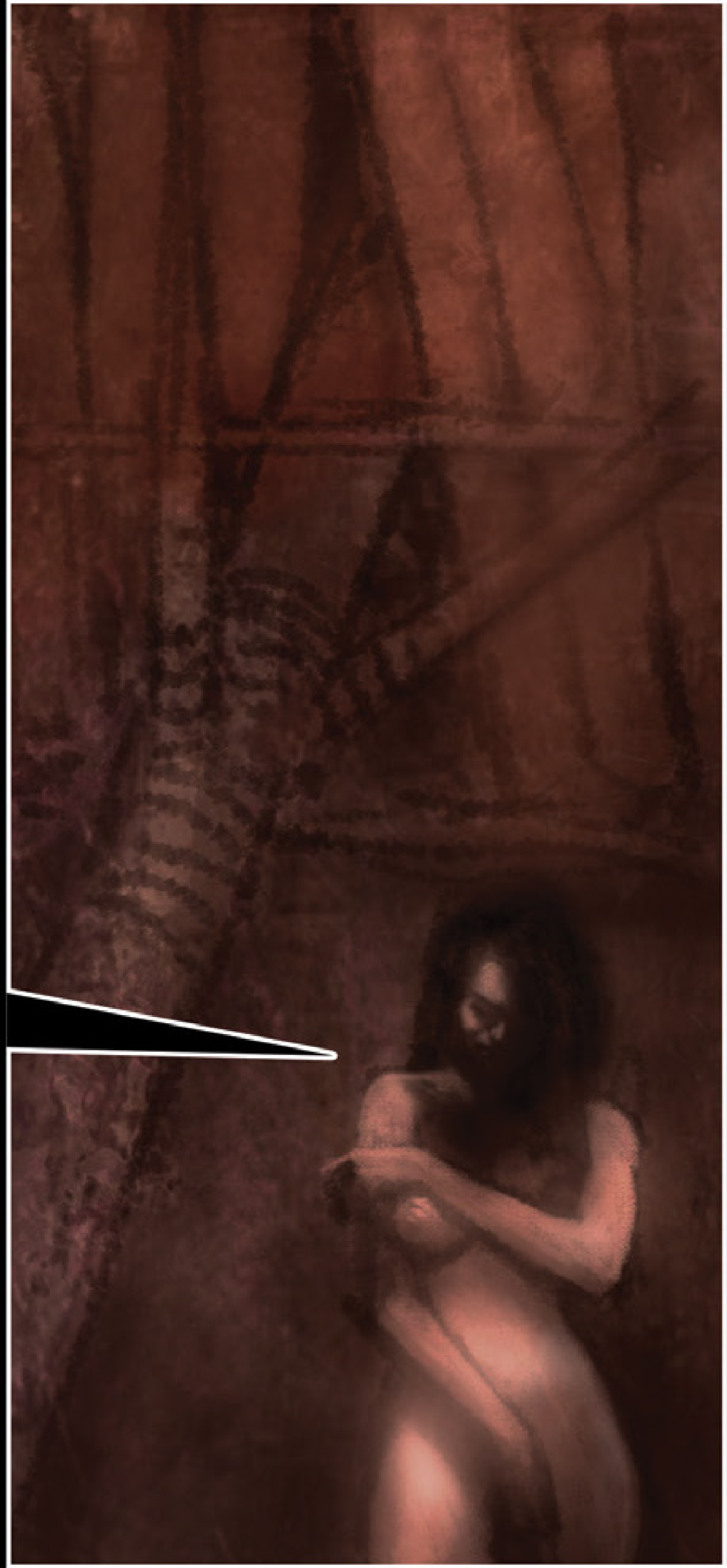
AND THEN A BLOODY ***SQUELK*** SHOWS UP...

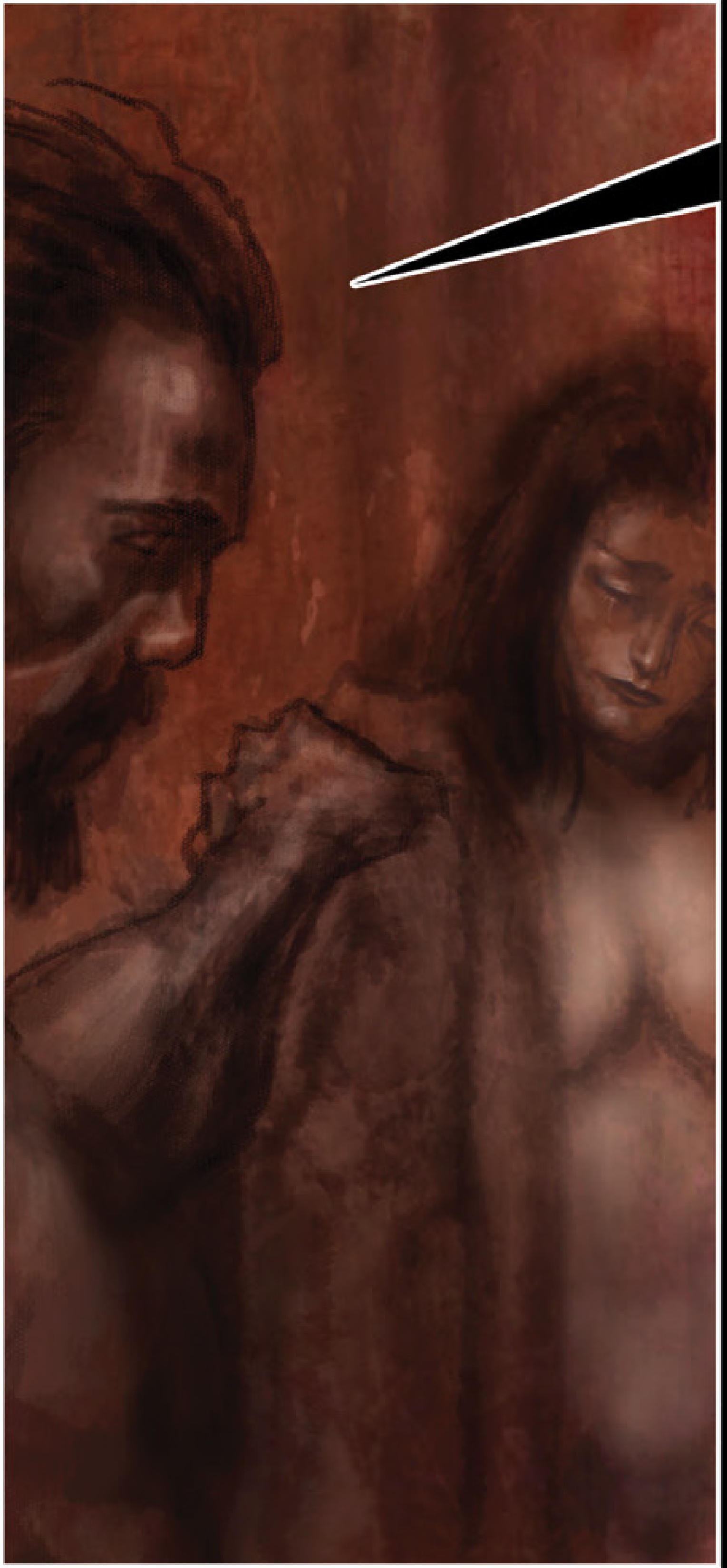
AND TO CAP THAT OFF, I GET TO HEAR (FEEL? SHARE?) THE DEATH THROES OF THE *TREE LADY FROM THE FUTURE* -

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN WAKING UP AND DECIDING TO ROB A PEASANT...

I MEAN...

FUCK, DARYL!!!





YOU HAVE TO KEEP WARM. PUT THESE ON.

HEY, LOOK. AMBER...

THIS IS...

I KNOW IT'S A SHOCK, OK? BUT WHAT COULD ANYBODY SAY? YOU HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING ABOUT ANY OF THIS!

BUT I DIDN'T KNOW EITHER. I'D FORGOTTEN EVERYTHING.

I JUST KNOW I WAS DRAWN TO YOU FOR A ***REASON.***

YOU FEEL IT TOO. I KNOW YOU DO.

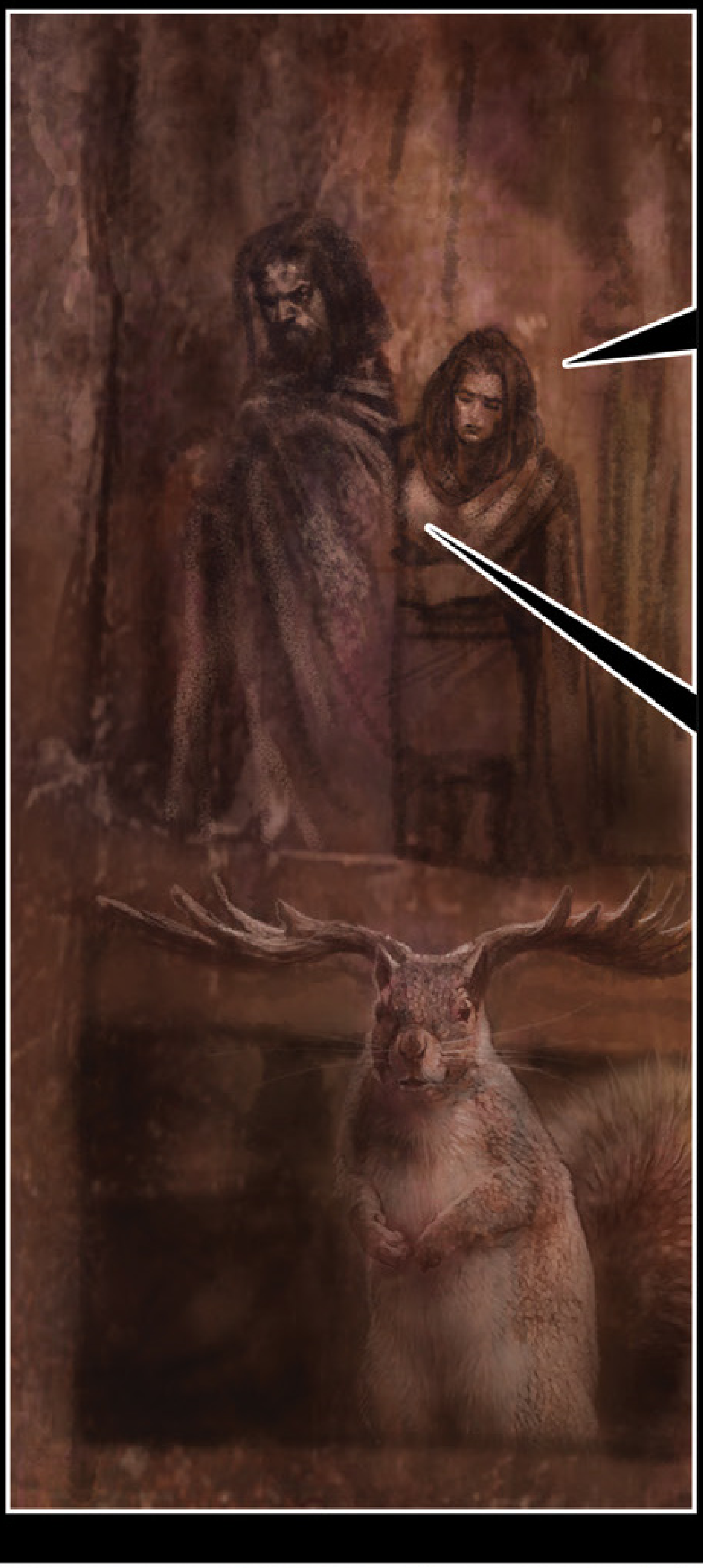
SO JUST...

GIVE IT TIME.

OK?

YOU'LL GET THROUGH IT. YOU'RE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK.

AND DON'T FEEL BAD. THIS PLACE SEEMS DESERTED.



FUCK, FUCKING, FUCKITTY FUCK PANTS!!!

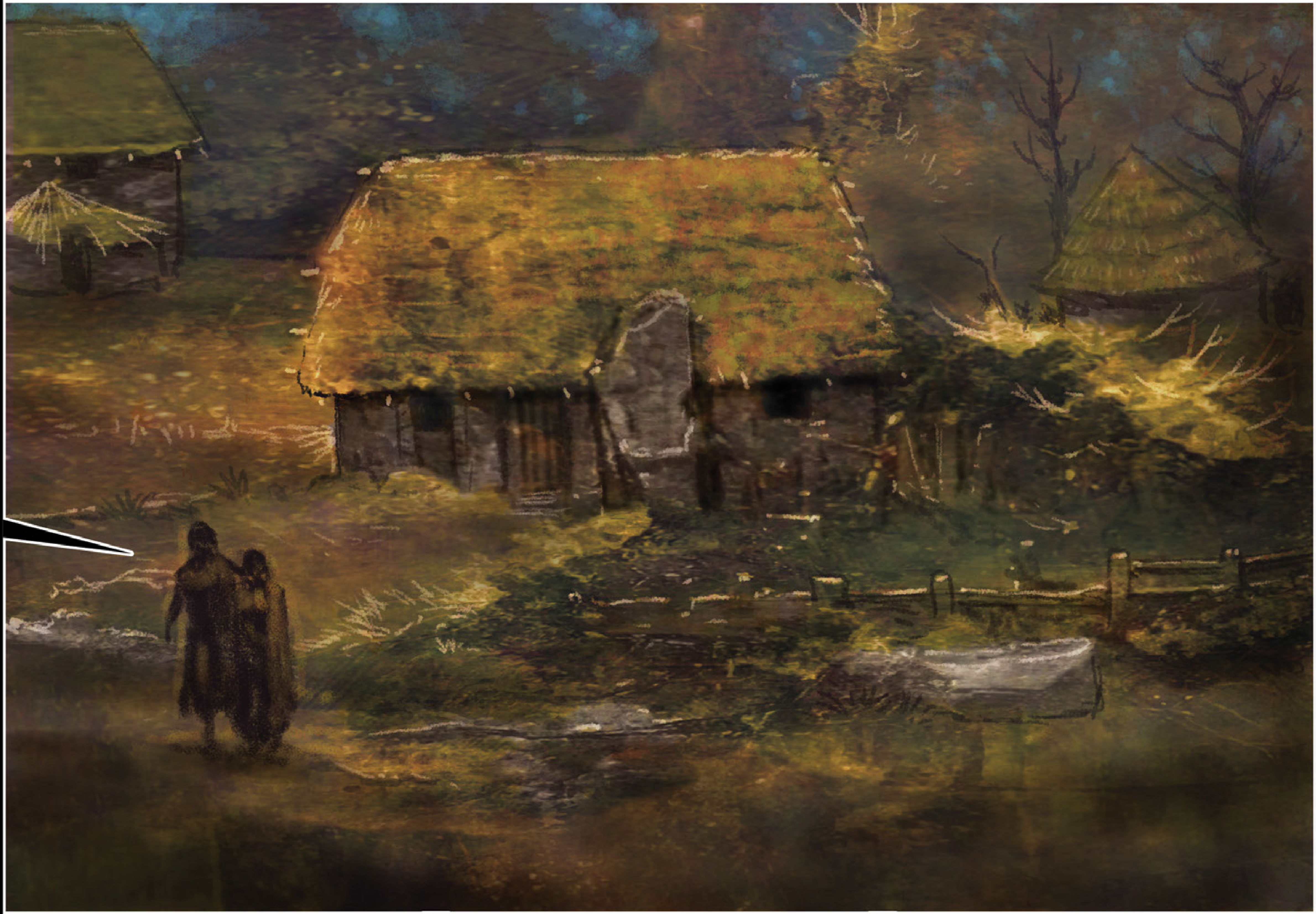
YEAH, *SEE?* THAT'S THE AMBER I KNOW.

I THINK I KNOW WHAT WE NEED TO DO NOW -

BUT IT'S A LONG HIKE!

WE'LL TAKE IT STEADY. ONE DAY AT A TIME.

K?



BY **GOD**, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU **MERLIN**!
HAVE YOU HEARD?
THE **SAXONS** ARE NO MORE, MY FRIEND! THEY HAVE FLED THESE LANDS!
AND WE HAVE QUELLED THE RED RAGE OF THE **HIBERNIANS**. THE **PICTS** AND **SCOTTS** NO LONGER PATROL OUR BORDERS LIKE WOLVES.
WE INVADED AND SUBDUED **ICELAND**! THE **GOTHS** AND **ORKNEYS** SURRENDERED TO OUR MIGHT. TELL ME, MY FRIEND...
...AM I NOT THE **GREAT KING** YOU PROPHESIZED?
BY WHAT EXAMPLE DO YOU JUDGE YOUR OWN 'GREATNESS', MY KING?
SHALL YOU BE AN **EMPEROR** NOW?
A LORD ABOVE **ALL** OTHERS?
THE CHARGE WAS TO PROTECT *THIS* KINGDOM, **MAGIC**, AND **ALL** THE FUTURE...
WILL EGO ALONE DICTATE THE MAN YOU ARE TO BE?

I COUNT YOU AMONGST MY MOST BELOVED, *MERLIN*. I TRULY DO. BUT WHO ARE ***YOU*** TO TALK TO YOUR ***KING*** IN SUCH A WAY?!!?
HOW ***DARE*** YOU?
DID I NOT DO ***ALL*** YOU ASKED OF ME?
ARE THESE ISLANDS NOT *UNITED*? ARE THE ***SAXONS*** NOT *VANQUISHED?*
NOT ONCE IN A *THOUSAND YEARS* HAS ***BRITAIN*** BEEN SO SAFE, OR SO *FEARED*. BUT KNOW THIS ALSO - I AM NOT YET DONE. NOT WHILE ***ROME*** STILL EXISTS.
I HAD A DREAM - A *VISION*...
I SAW A ***DRAGON*** FACING A GREAT SHAGGY-PELTED ***BEAR***... AND I KNEW THE BEAR MUST BE *TAMED!* WHAT SAY YOU TO THAT, WIZARD?
MY LORD, MY KING. FORGIVE ME IF I *MISSPOKE*. BUT IF I DO NOT SPEAK TRUTH TO YOUR POWER, THEN WHO ELSE WOULD DARE TO?
SUCH IS MY WORK, AND SO MUST I DO IT, EVEN AT RISK OF MY OWN LIFE. I MUST.
AS FOR THE *DREAM?*
WHAT YOU IN FACT SAW, MY LORD, WAS A DRAGON AND A ***BOAR***. NOT A BEAR.
NEITHER WERE ***YOU*** THE ***DRAGON***.
THAT TOLD HIM! MEANWHILE...

...WHAT ABOUT ***ME?*** WELL -

I STILL HAVE NO IDEA HOW LONG WE WALKED. I WAS IN A DAZE FOR MUCH OF IT - 'PSYCHIC STRESS' DARYL SAID. (AND YEAH, THAT'S NOT HIS ACTUAL NAME, BUT IT'S WHAT I CALL HIM. THAT'S WHO I KNEW, SO...)

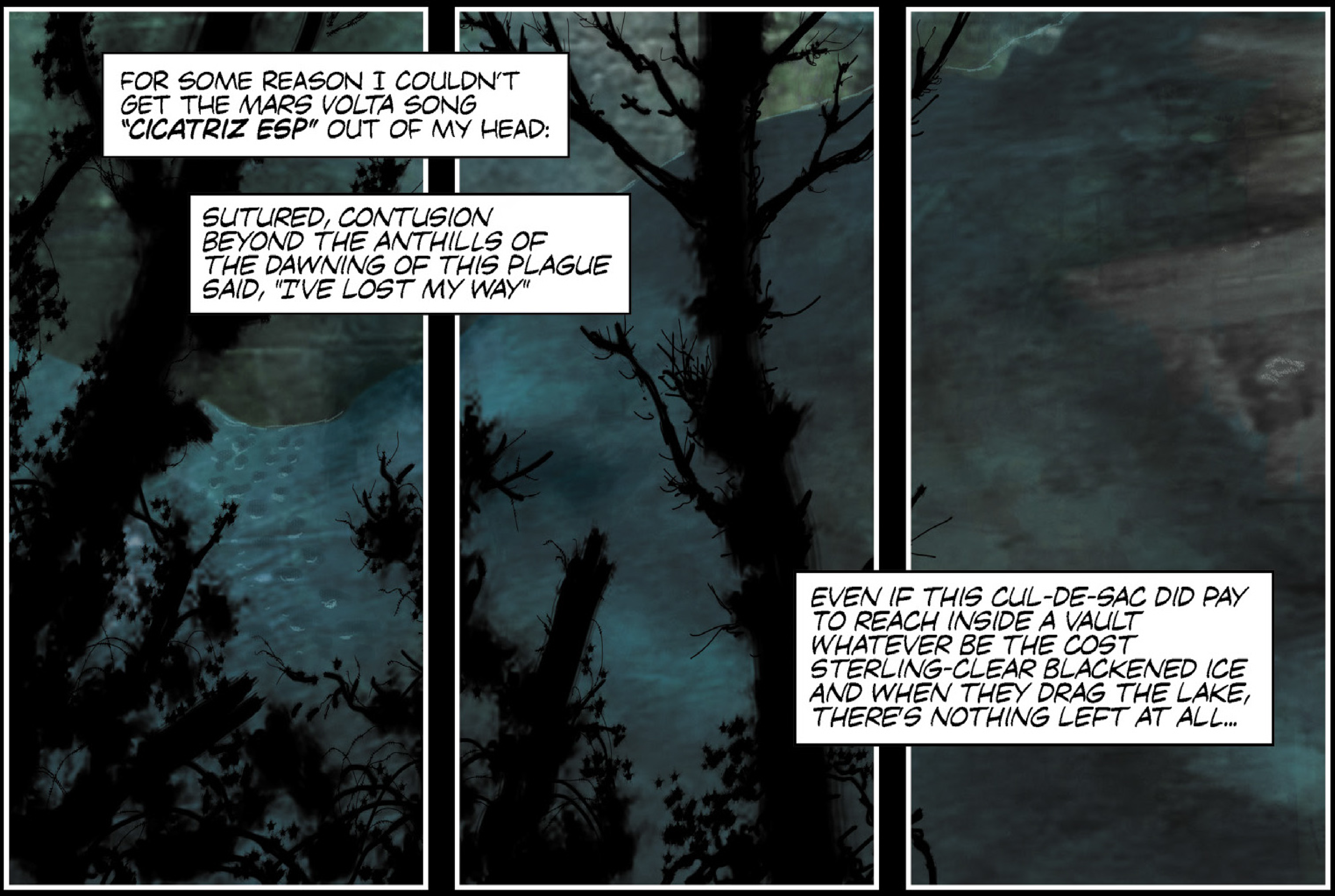
I REMEMBER WISHING I STILL HAD THE ***VW*** - NOT THAT IT WOULD HAVE HELPED! EVEN A ***HUMMER*** WOULD'VE BEEN FUCKED, FRANKLY!

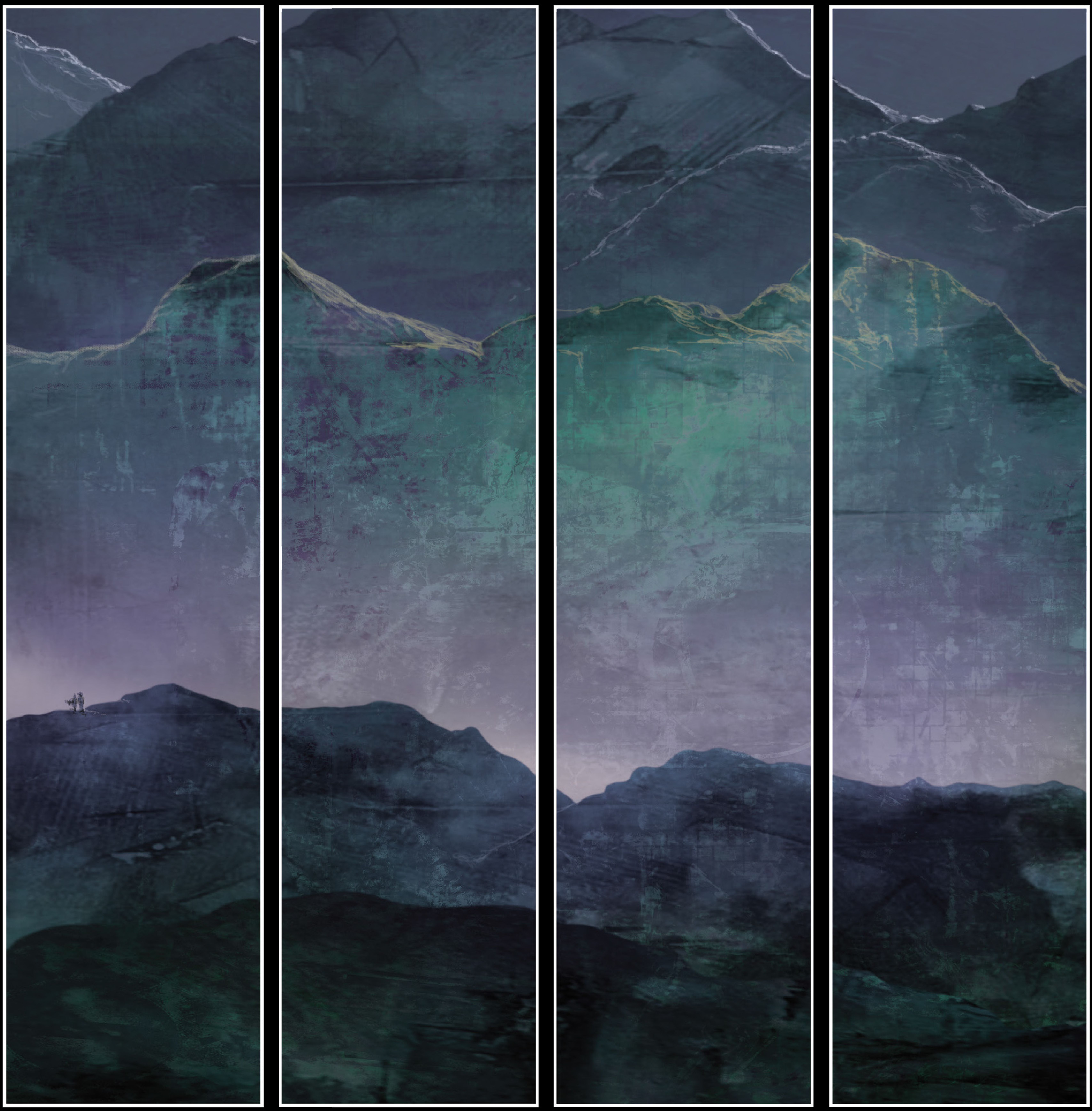
I DON'T THINK I WAS READY. WHO COULD EVER BE READY? THIS WAS NOT MY AGE. MY TIME. MY ANYTHING!

AND EVERYTHING WAS BROKEN. DYING. YOU COULD SENSE THE RUIN - LIKE A ***SICKNESS***. SOMETHING WAS VERY WRONG.

FOR DAYS WE ROAMED. WE DRANK FROM DANK BROOKS, GATHERED BITTER NUTS, OR STOLE FROM PEOPLE EVEN WORSE OFF THAN OURSELVES. I'M NOT PROUD OF THAT. BUT WE DID.

WOODLAND GAVE WAY TO PEET BOG, SANDSTONE BLUFF TO MOUNTAIN OF SLATE.


FOR SOME REASON I COULDN'T GET THE MARS VOLTA SONG ***"CICATRIZ ESP"*** OUT OF MY HEAD:
SUTURED, CONTUSION BEYOND THE ANTHILLS OF THE DAWNING OF THIS PLAGUE SAID, "I'VE LOST MY WAY"
EVEN IF THIS CUL-DE-SAC DID PAY TO REACH INSIDE A VAULT WHATEVER BE THE COST STERLING-CLEAR BLACKENED ICE AND WHEN THEY DRAG THE LAKE, THERE'S NOTHING LEFT AT ALL...



BUT EVEN IN THAT DARK LAND

- A COUNTRY THAT WOULD ONE DAY BE MY HOME, BUT WAS NOW BARELY RECOGNIZABLE TO ME -

I BEGAN TO NOTICE THAT I WAS SEEING EVERYTHING WITH NEW EYES. IT WAS DIFFERENT.
SOMETHING HAD CHANGED.

MY PARENTS' DEATH HAD ROBBED THE WORLD OF COLOUR, BUT NOW I WAS AWAKENING TO IT AGAIN.

LIGHT DANCED IN MY EYES.

OVER HILL AND DALE, MOOR AND MOUNTAIN, DARYL LED ME, SAYING VERY LITTLE - WHAT COULD HE SAY? - BUT ATTENTIVE. GENTLE. KIND.

HE LED, AND I FOLLOWED - LIKE A NEWBORN, IMPRINTING ON ITS PARENT. I DON'T KNOW THAT I *TRUSTED* HIM YET, JUST THAT I *NEEDED* HIM. MORE THAN ANY OTHER SOUL IN MY LIFE, I NEEDED HIM.

TO GUIDE ME.
TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS.
TO KEEP ME SAFE.

AND OUR TINY ISLAND KINGDOM SEEMED FUCKING HUGE TO ME! BUT SO VERY *FRAGILE* TOO.

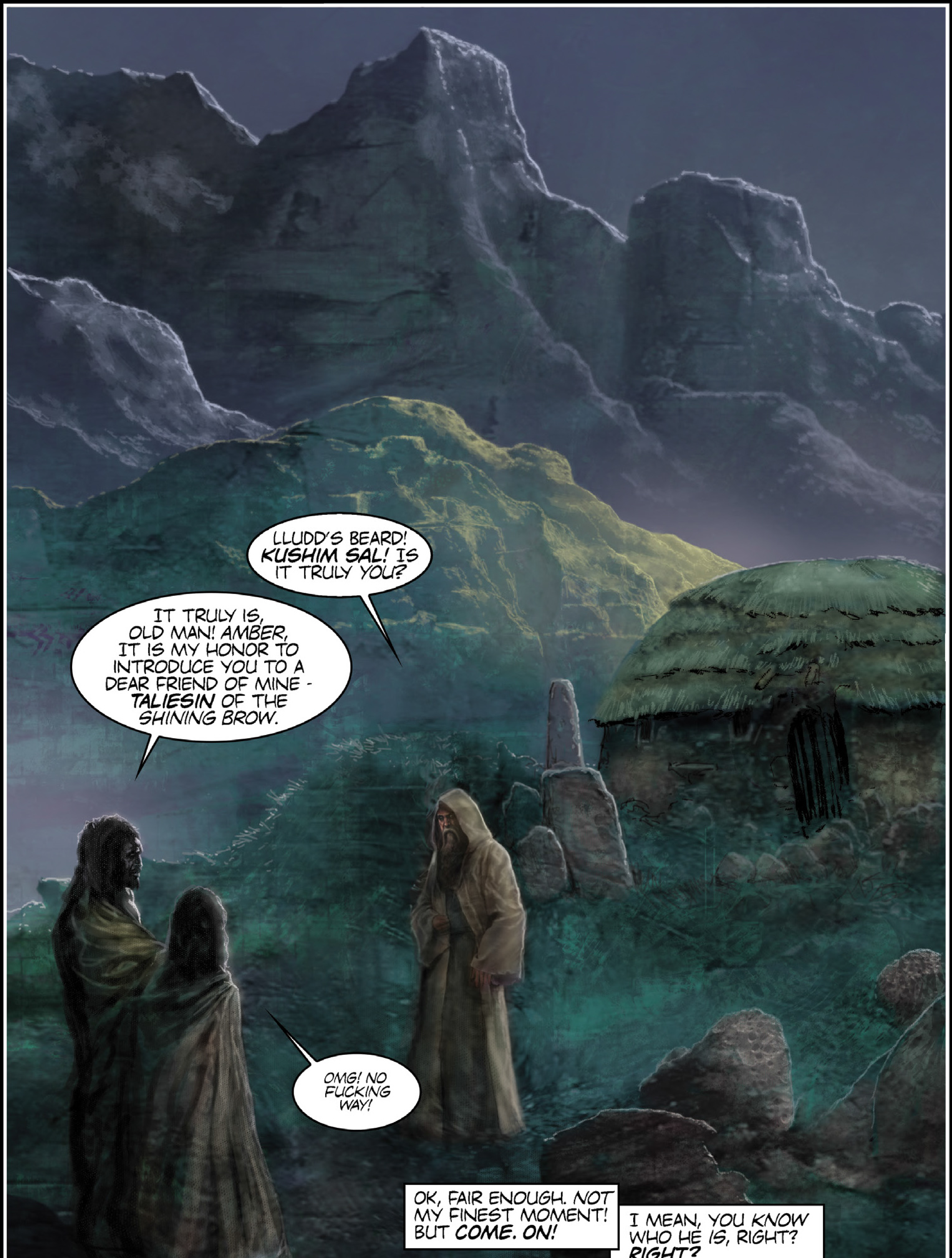
IF WE COULD ONLY HEAR THE EARTH CRY, I THOUGHT, PERHAPS WE WOULD TREAD LIGHTER ON HER.

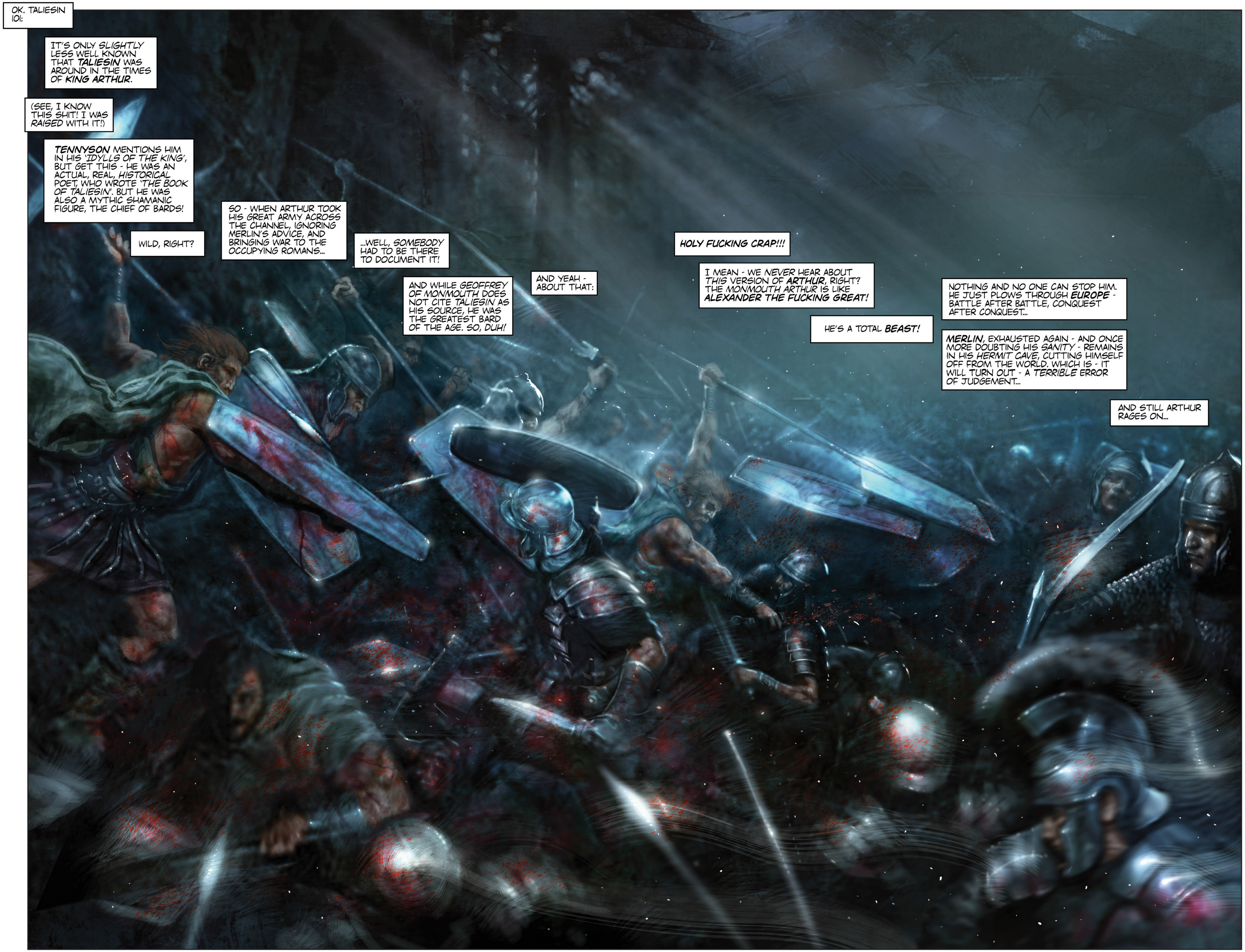
PERHAPS.

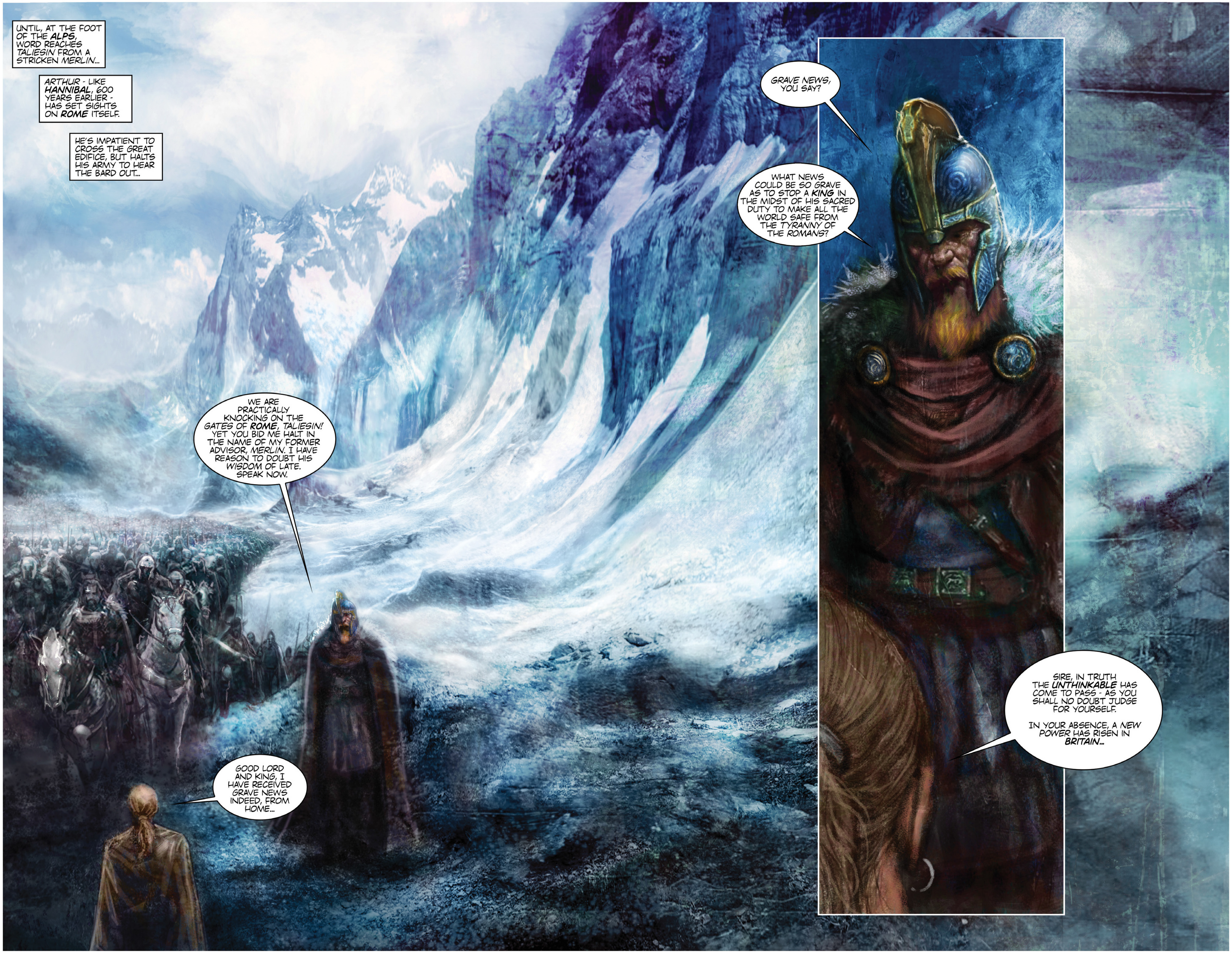
AND AS THE COLD DAYS AND DAMP, BITTER NIGHTS PASSED, THE TERRIBLE SHOCK OF IT ALL SLOWLY EASED. DARYL TOLD ME WE WERE ALMOST THERE. THAT IF WE WERE LUCKY, IF SOME OF THE PRIOR TIME-LINE REMAINED AS IT WAS, THEN WE MIGHT FIND THE ONE PERSON WHO COULD HELP US.

A STORYTELLER.
A WISEMAN.
A CHIASMUS.

A LIVING SIGIL, OBLIVIOUS OF HIS OWN ENORMOUS NATURAL POWER...


LLUDD'S BEARD! ***KUSHIM SAL!*** IS IT TRULY YOU?
IT TRULY IS, OLD MAN! *AMBER*, IT IS MY HONOR TO INTRODUCE YOU TO A DEAR FRIEND OF MINE - ***TALIESIN*** OF THE *SHINING BROW.*
OMG! NO FUCKING WAY!
OK, FAIR ENOUGH. NOT MY FINEST MOMENT! BUT ***COME. ON!***
I MEAN, YOU *KNOW* WHO HE *IS*, RIGHT? ***RIGHT?***


OK. TALIESIN 101:
IT'S ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS WELL KNOWN THAT TALIESIN WAS AROUND IN THE TIMES OF KING ARTHUR.
(SEE, I KNOW THIS SHIT! I WAS RAISED WITH IT!)
TENNYSON MENTIONS HIM IN HIS 'IDYLLS OF THE KING', BUT GET THIS - HE WAS AN ACTUAL, REAL, HISTORICAL POET, WHO WROTE 'THE BOOK OF TALIESIN'. BUT HE WAS ALSO A MYTHIC SHAMANIC FIGURE, THE CHIEF OF BARDS!
WILD, RIGHT?
SO - WHEN ARTHUR TOOK HIS GREAT ARMY ACROSS THE CHANNEL, IGNORING MERLIN'S ADVICE, AND BRINGING WAR TO THE OCCUPYING ROMANS...
...WELL, SOMEBODY HAD TO BE THERE TO DOCUMENT IT!
AND WHILE GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH DOES NOT CITE TALIESIN AS HIS SOURCE, HE WAS THE GREATEST BARD OF THE AGE. SO, DUH!
AND YEAH - ABOUT THAT:
HOLY FUCKING CRAP!!!
I MEAN - WE NEVER HEAR ABOUT THIS VERSION OF ARTHUR, RIGHT? THE MONMOUTH ARTHUR IS LIKE ALEXANDER THE FUCKING GREAT!
HE'S A TOTAL BEAST!
NOTHING AND NO ONE CAN STOP HIM. HE JUST PLOWS THROUGH EUROPE - BATTLE AFTER BATTLE, CONQUEST AFTER CONQUEST...
MERLIN, EXHAUSTED AGAIN - AND ONCE MORE DOUBTING HIS SANITY - REMAINS IN HIS HERMIT CAVE, CUTTING HIMSELF OFF FROM THE WORLD. WHICH IS - IT WILL TURN OUT - A TERRIBLE ERROR OF JUDGEMENT...
AND STILL ARTHUR RAGES ON...


UNTIL, AT THE FOOT OF THE **ALPS**, WORD REACHES *TALIESIN* FROM A STRICKEN MERLIN...
ARTHUR - LIKE **HANNIBAL**, 600 YEARS EARLIER - HAS SET SIGHTS ON ***ROME*** ITSELF.
HE'S IMPATIENT TO CROSS THE GREAT EDIFICE, BUT HALTS HIS ARMY TO HEAR THE BARD OUT...
WE ARE PRACTICALLY KNOCKING ON THE *GATES OF* ***ROME***, *TALIESIN!* YET YOU BID ME HALT IN THE NAME OF MY FORMER ADVISOR, *MERLIN*. I HAVE REASON TO DOUBT HIS WISDOM OF LATE. SPEAK NOW.
GOOD LORD AND KING, I HAVE RECEIVED GRAVE NEWS INDEED, FROM HOME...
GRAVE NEWS, YOU SAY?
WHAT NEWS COULD BE SO GRAVE AS TO STOP A ***KING*** IN THE MIDST OF HIS SACRED DUTY TO MAKE ALL THE WORLD SAFE FROM THE *TYRANNY OF THE ROMANS?*
SIRE, IN TRUTH THE ***UNTHINKABLE*** HAS COME TO PASS - AS YOU SHALL NO DOUBT JUDGE FOR YOURSELF.
IN YOUR ABSENCE, A *NEW POWER* HAS RISEN IN ***BRITAIN...***

"YOUR NEPHEW, **MODRED**, HAS CLAIMED THE THRONE. HE IS SAID TO BE IN THRALL TO A MYSTERIOUS *DARK QUEEN* NAMED **GUANHUMARA**, AND ATTENDED BY A DEATHLESS KNIGHT OF GREAT STATURE...
"GOOD KING - YOU MUST RETURN TO **BRITAIN** TO DEFEND YOUR BIRTHRIGHT!"

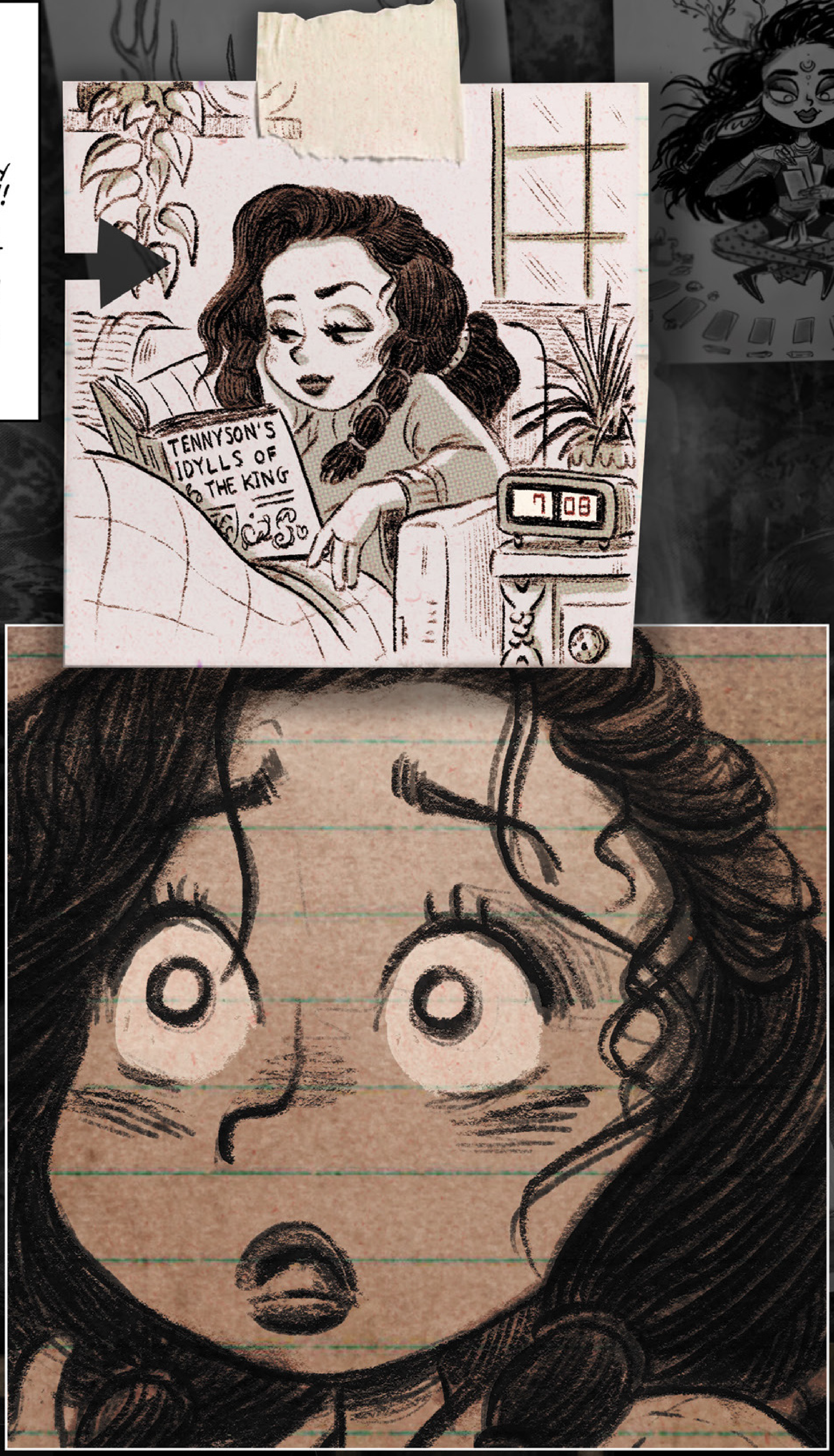
UHM.

SO YEAH.

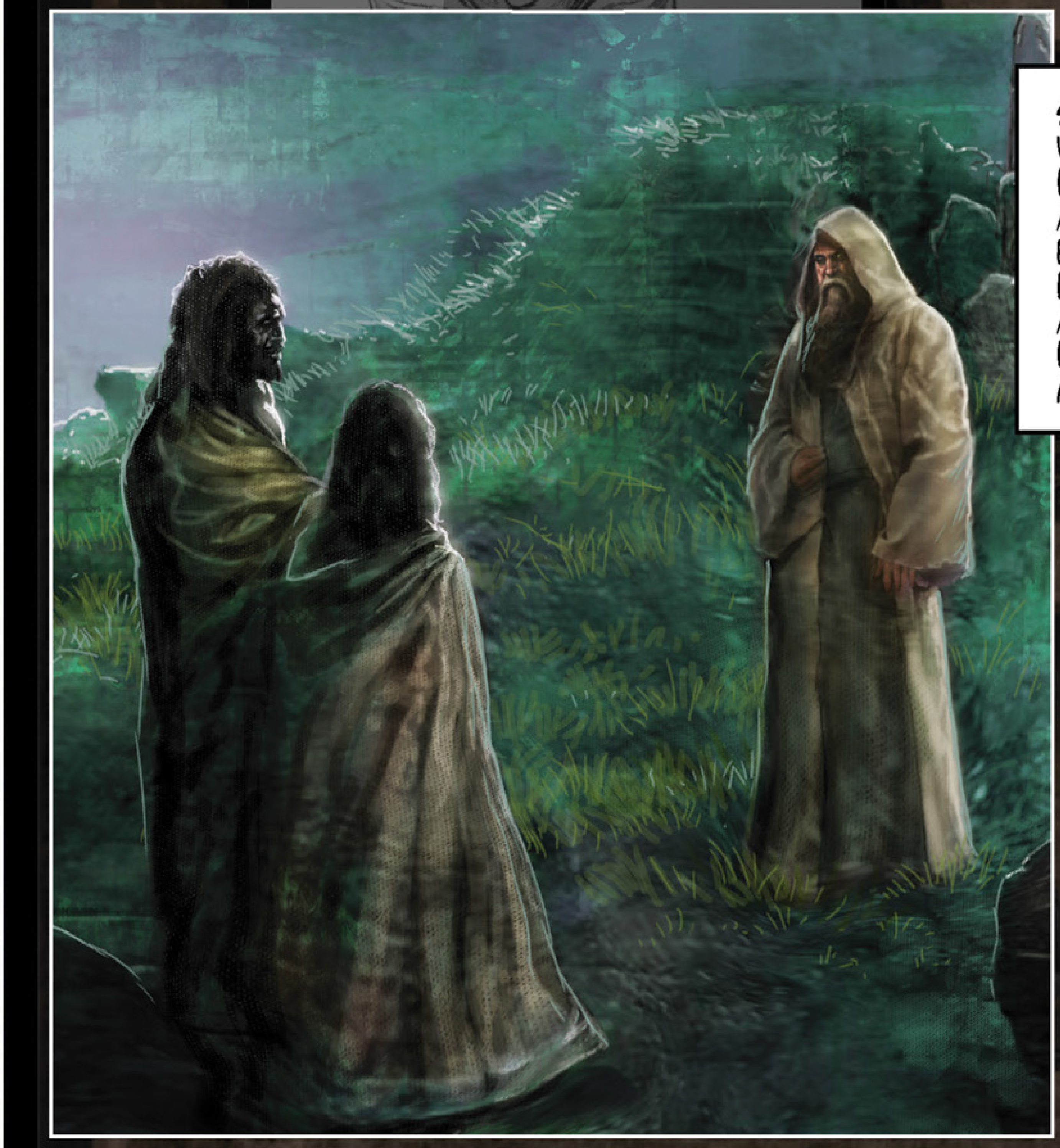
THIS GUY WAS ONLY BLOODY ***TALIESIN!!!***

SO PERHAPS YOU'LL FORGIVE THIS GIRL FOR FREAKING OUT!

I WAS, TO USE THE POPULAR TERM, 'FAN-GIRLING'.


TENNYSON'S IDYLLS OF THE KING
7:08

NOW, DEAR READER, ***WHOEVER*** AND ***WHENEVER*** YOU ARE, IF THIS WAS A *REAL COMIC*, I'M GUESSING WE'D BE JUST ABOUT GETTING INTO *ISSUE 6*, THE END OF THE FIRST CHAPTER - OR MAYBE I'LL CALL IT 'BOOK ONE'. WHICH IS COOL, BECAUSE IT'S THE BIT WHERE THINGS START TO COME TOGETHER - KIND OF!



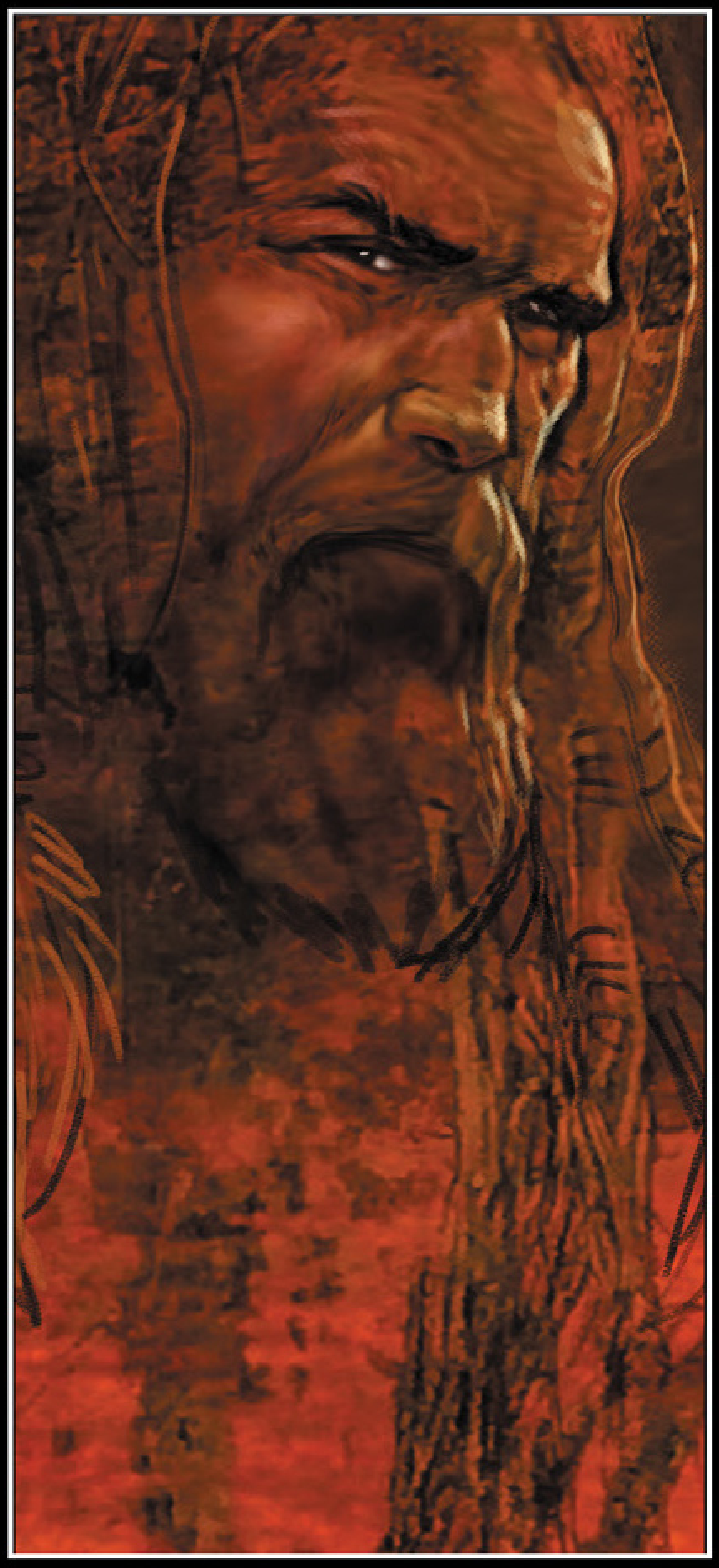
SO DARYL AND TALIESIN - WHO ARE OLD FRIENDS!!!! - HUG. (HUG HUG) AND I GET A HUG TOO (HUG HUG). WE EAT SOME RABBIT STEW, DRINK SOMETHING SWEET AND ALCOHOLIC, AND THEN DARYL ASKS *"WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE?"*

(WHICH WAS ABOUT TIME, BECAUSE I STILL HAD NO REAL IDEA WHAT WAS GOING ON AT THAT POINT!)

AND THAT WAS HOW I GOT TO HEAR THE CHIEF OF BARDS TELL THIS STORY:

THE LOST BOOK OF TALIESIN - A SONG OF LAMENTATION FOR THE KING

It was with a heavy heart and a deep anger that our King, Arthur, returned to the shores of this green and sceptered isle, his plans to conquer Rome - for the time, at least - thwarted. And how the great white cliffs loomed, a fortress crafted by nature, jutting mightily from the belly of the sea on his approach!



Upon that vast chalk edifice, bathed in bloodied hues at the set of sun, did the grim Boar of Cornwall meet once more with his former friend, Merlin.

“Well?” he said, “You have dragged me from such a certain victory as would rouse the sleeping gods of Olympus! Zeus himself could not have saved Rome. And yet you, who questioned the noble purpose of my crusade, have stopped me!

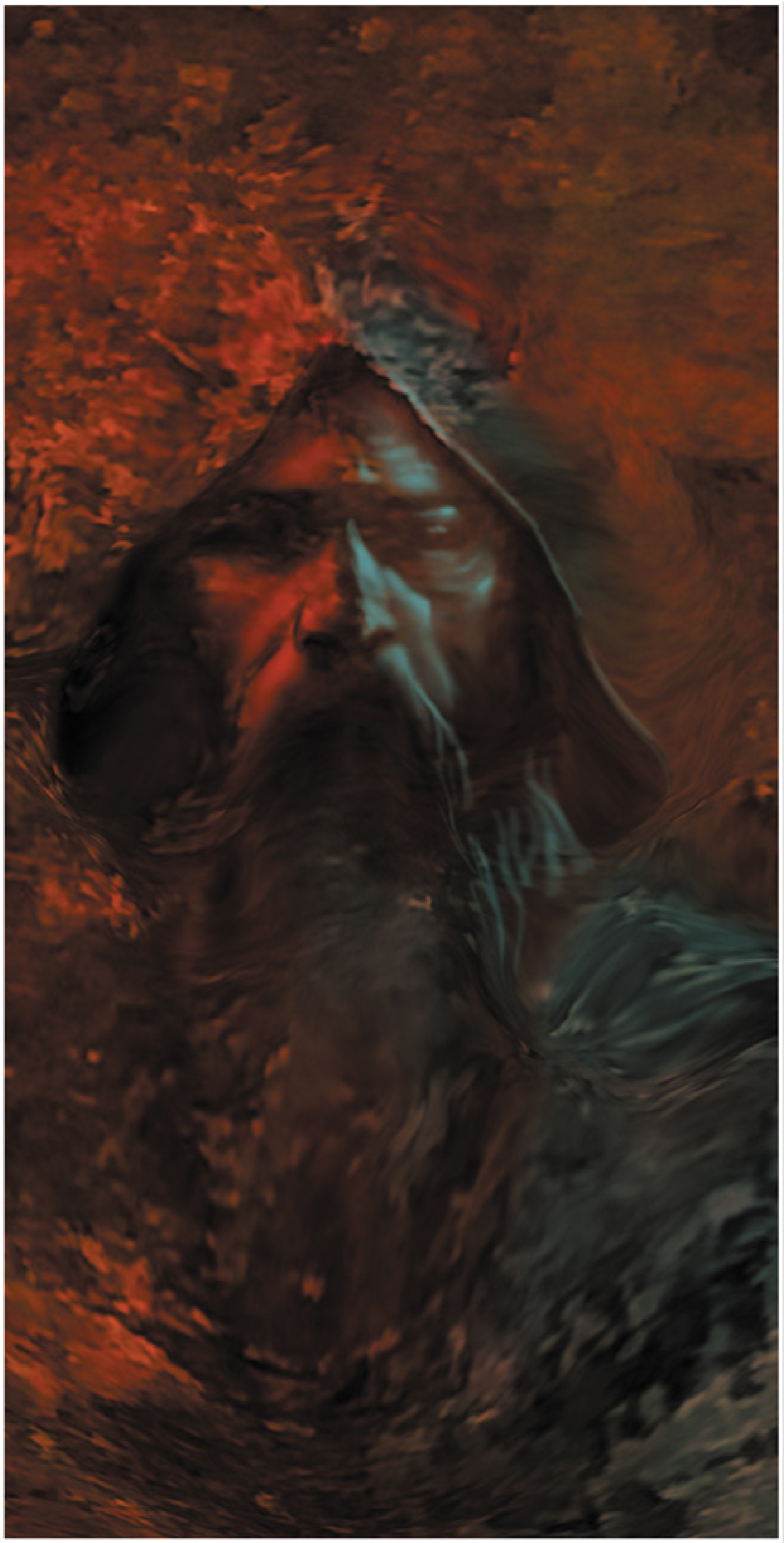
“I, whose father and his father before him, were sons of Brutus, whose foot alighted upon the rock of Totness, founding this brave island kingdom of the Britons! He, who was himself the son of Aeneas, whose mother was the goddess Aphrodite. He, who founded Rome! So it is my birthright to reclaim her, is it not?

“And yet, here stand I.

“Speak, wizard, and have done, for such an anger burns within me that should I say more it would burst forth in violent flame!”

And I did watch then as Merlin, pale and troubled by travails he alone of men endured, raised sad eyes and addressed the king.

“Doest thou truly not know me, Lord Arthur? I, that never wavered in my love, and that gifted you the very powers you chose to wield in pursuit of conquest?



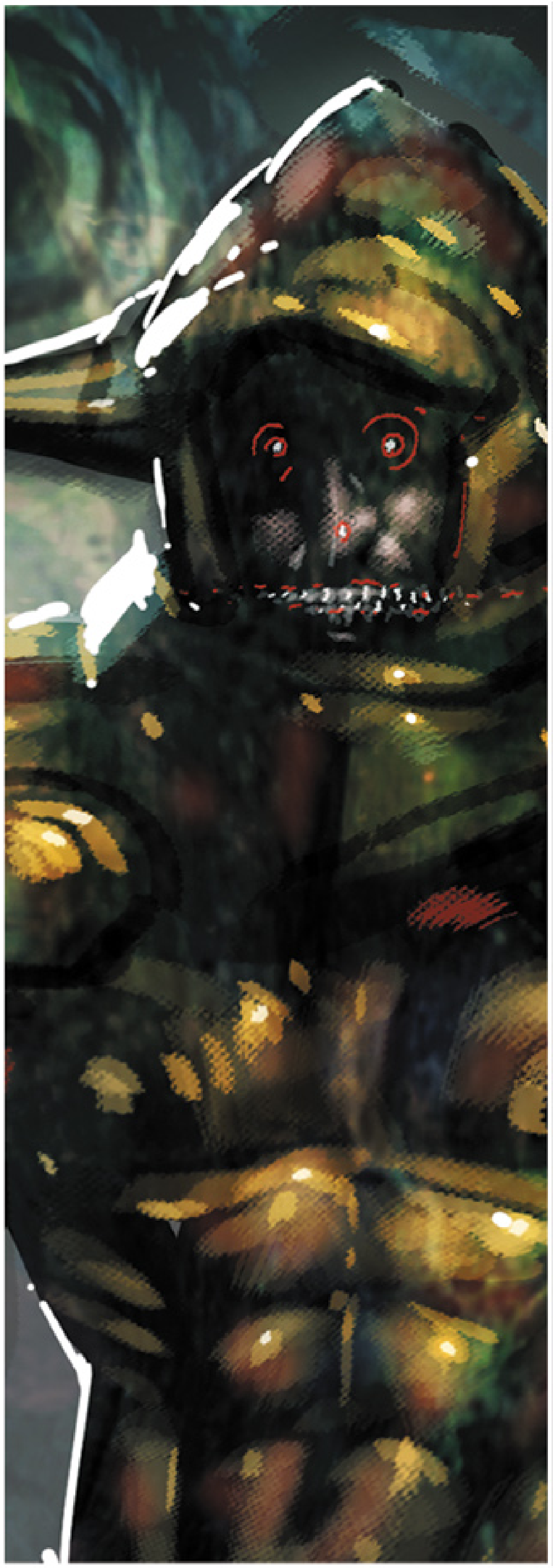
“But let us not fall afoul of each other this night, dear king, most beloved of friends - even if my love be such folly as the embracing ocean wave’s eternal breaking upon the unyielding shore. If love be one way, so be it!

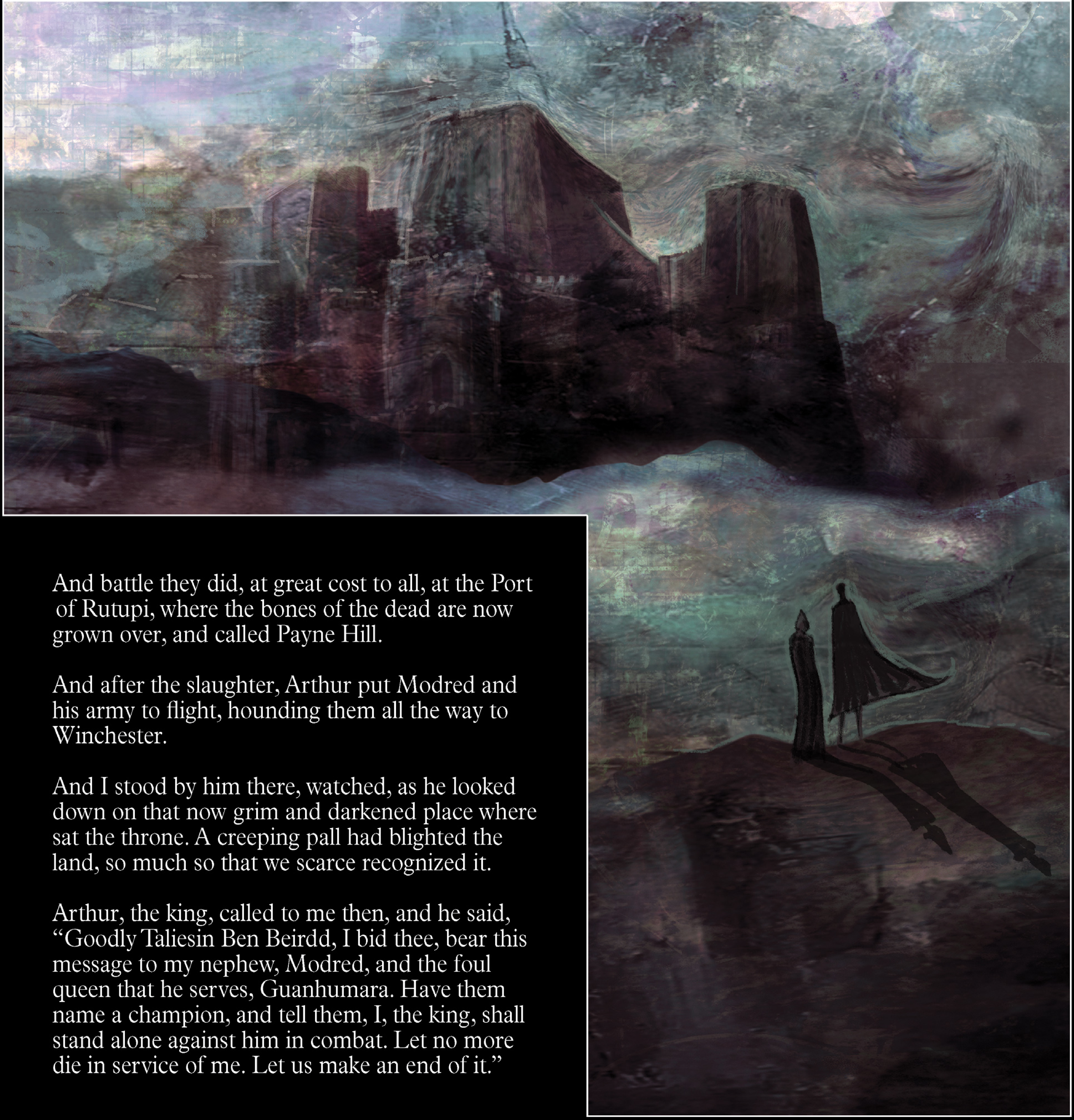
“Yet still, I beg thee - hear me, oh king.

“Your nephew, the traitor, Modred, sent Celdric, the Saxon leader, into Germany, there to raise all the forces he could find, and return with all speed. And to him was promised land, from the Humber to Scotland, and all that Hengist once possessed of Kent.

“And with them now stand the Picts, the Scots and the Hibernians, my lord king. All they that you subdued and vanquished have gathered in your absence and seek, in turn, to keep you from the seat of your great power.

“They will join us here, in battle, on the morrow...”





And battle they did, at great cost to all, at the Port of Rutupi, where the bones of the dead are now grown over, and called Payne Hill.

And after the slaughter, Arthur put Modred and his army to flight, hounding them all the way to Winchester.

And I stood by him there, watched, as he looked down on that now grim and darkened place where sat the throne. A creeping pall had blighted the land, so much so that we scarce recognized it.

Arthur, the king, called to me then, and he said, “Goodly Taliesin Ben Beirdd, I bid thee, bear this message to my nephew, Modred, and the foul queen that he serves, Guanhumara. Have them name a champion, and tell them, I, the king, shall stand alone against him in combat. Let no more die in service of me. Let us make an end of it.”

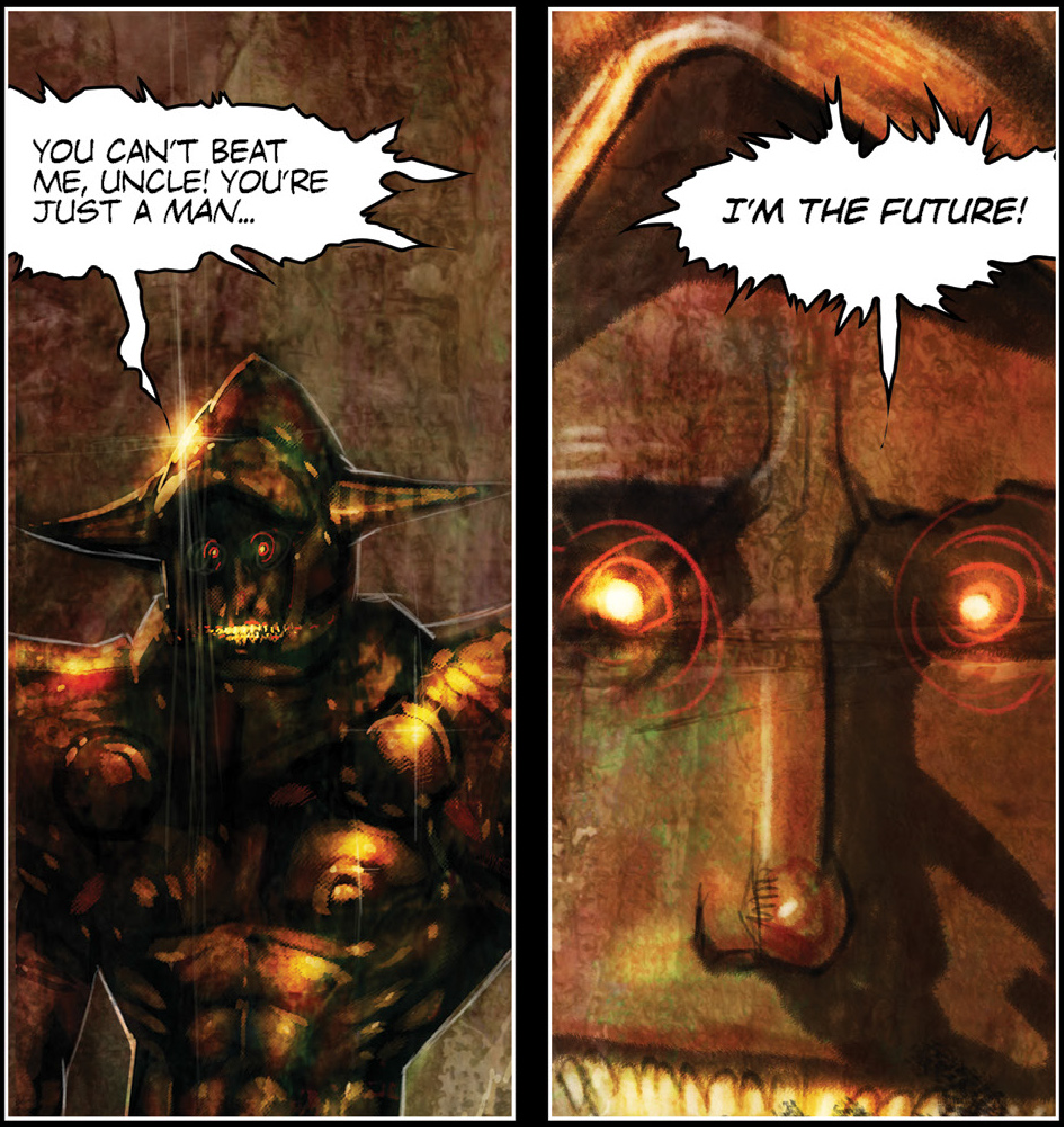
And so it was that Modred put forward himself as the champion of the queen.

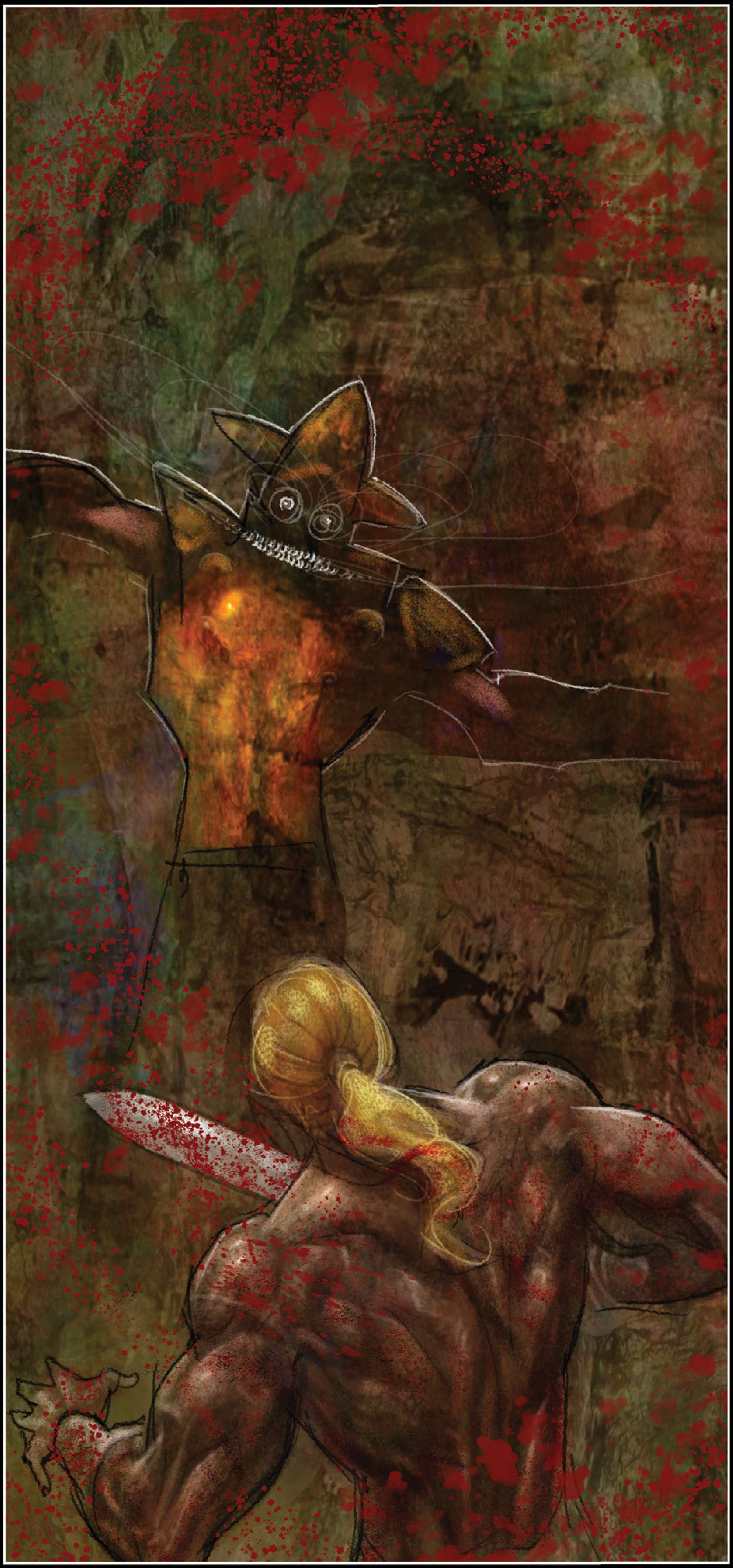
A twisted creature remade by arcane energies, he carried within him such strength as belied his slight stature.

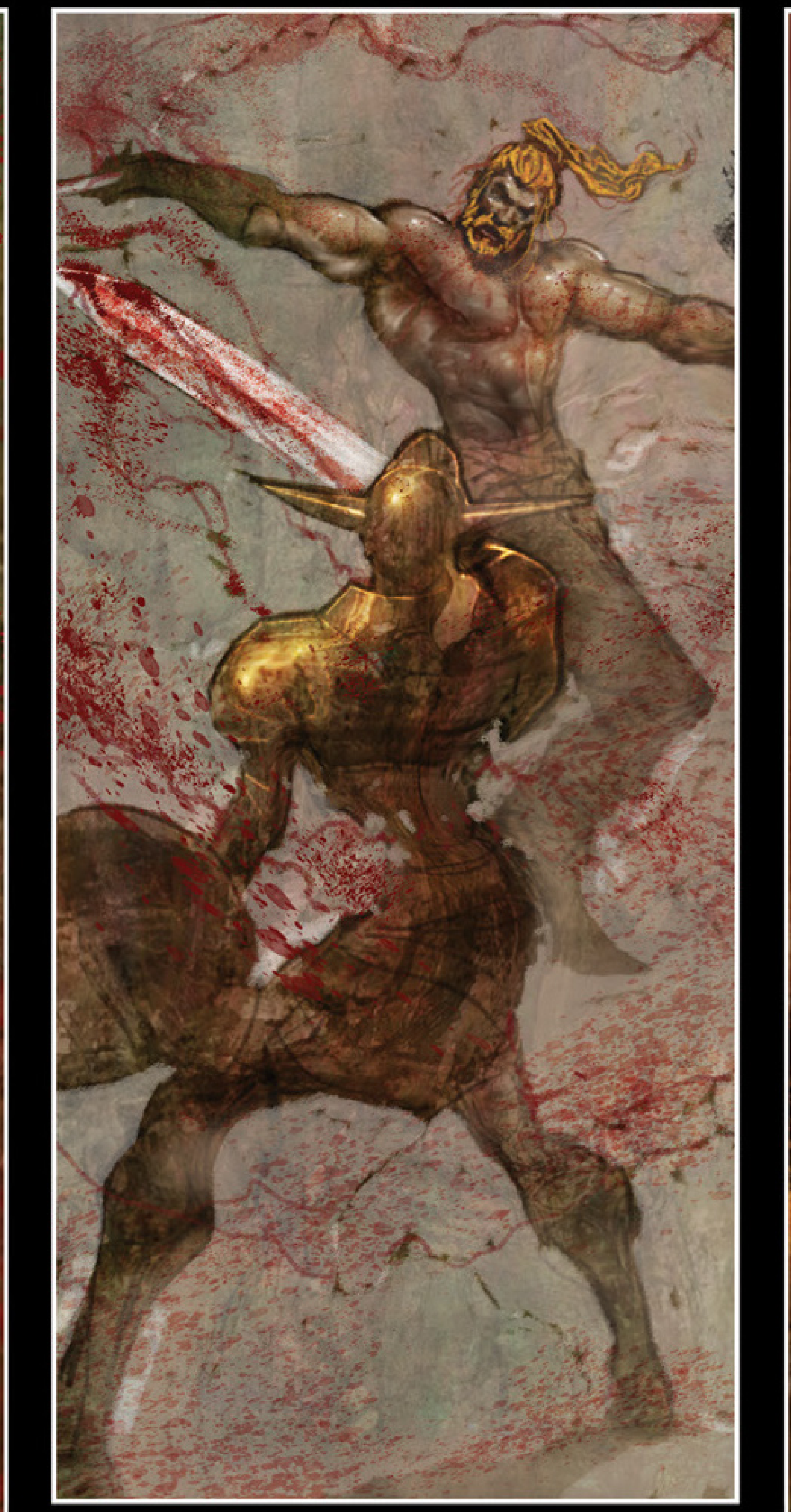
Some recall that their battle raged for months, sun and moon swinging drunkenly across the heavens, a thousand times over and a thousand more.

Others say it lasted years, and whole ages of humanity passed by - cities raised and razed, civilizations birthed and buried - within the encompassing duration of that conflagration.

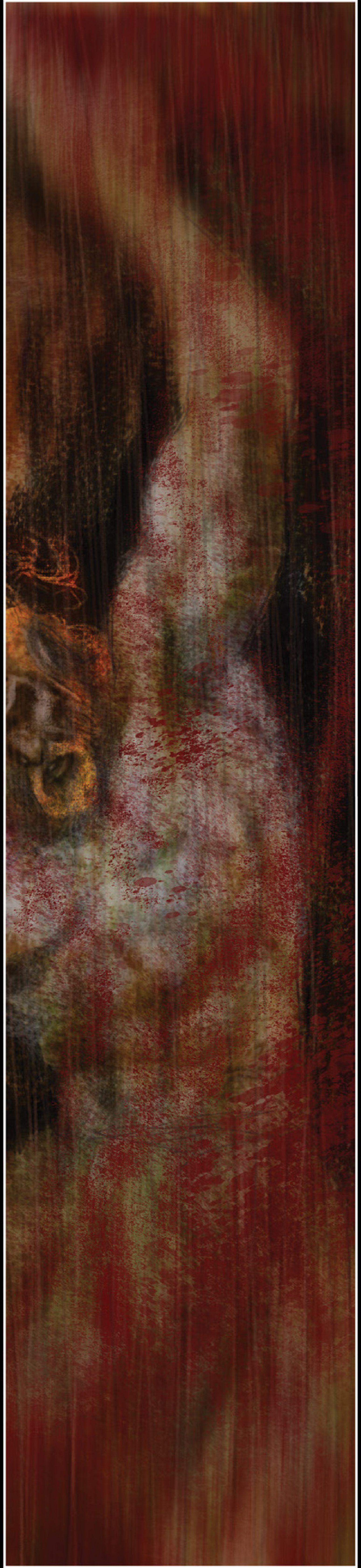
Nothing, it seemed, could stop Modred's fanatical onslaught. Gutted and flayed he yet attacked, his bones seemingly turned to iron...


YOU CAN'T BEAT ME, UNCLE! YOU'RE JUST A MAN...
I'M THE FUTURE!

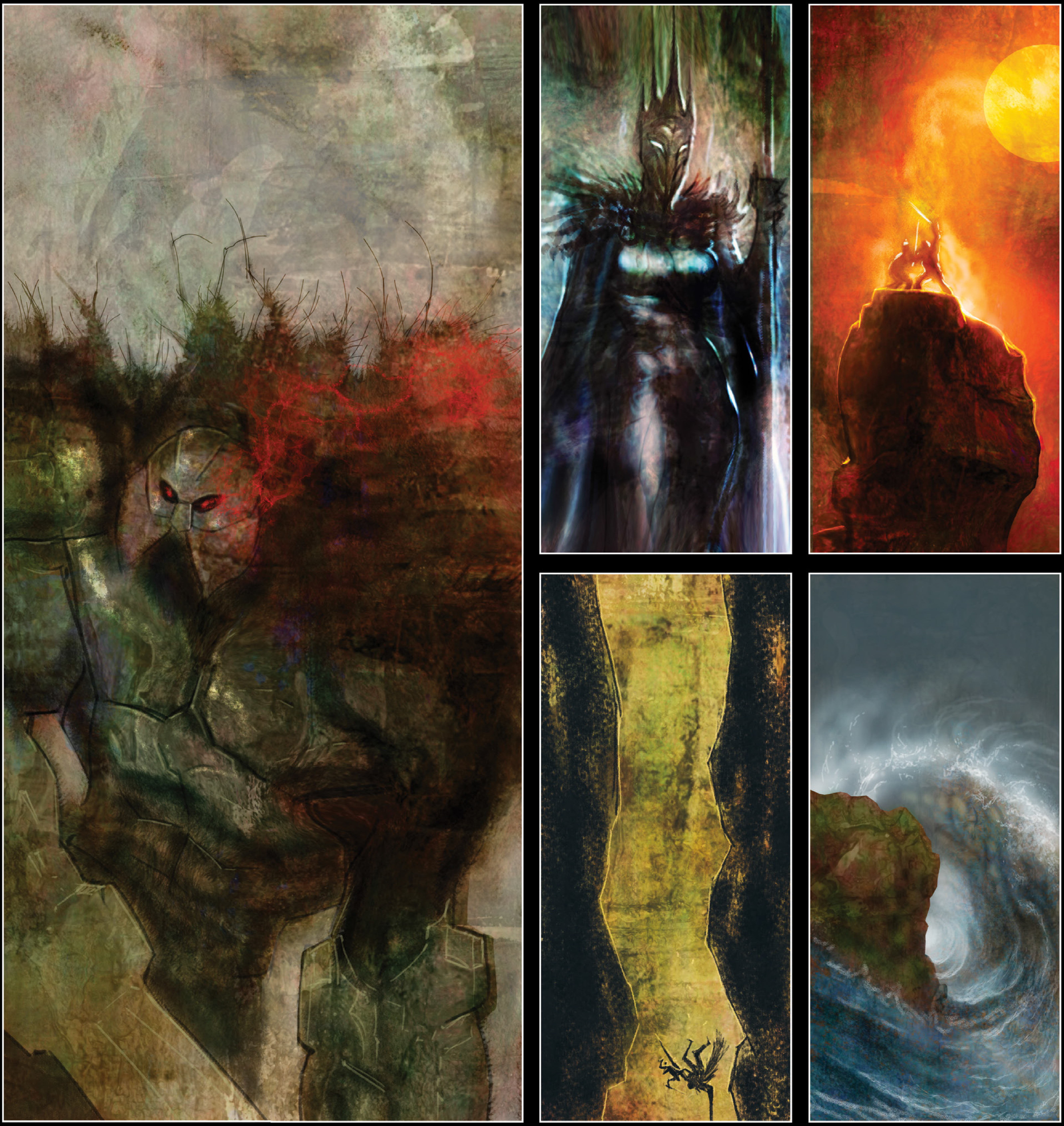




But at the last...



...victory!



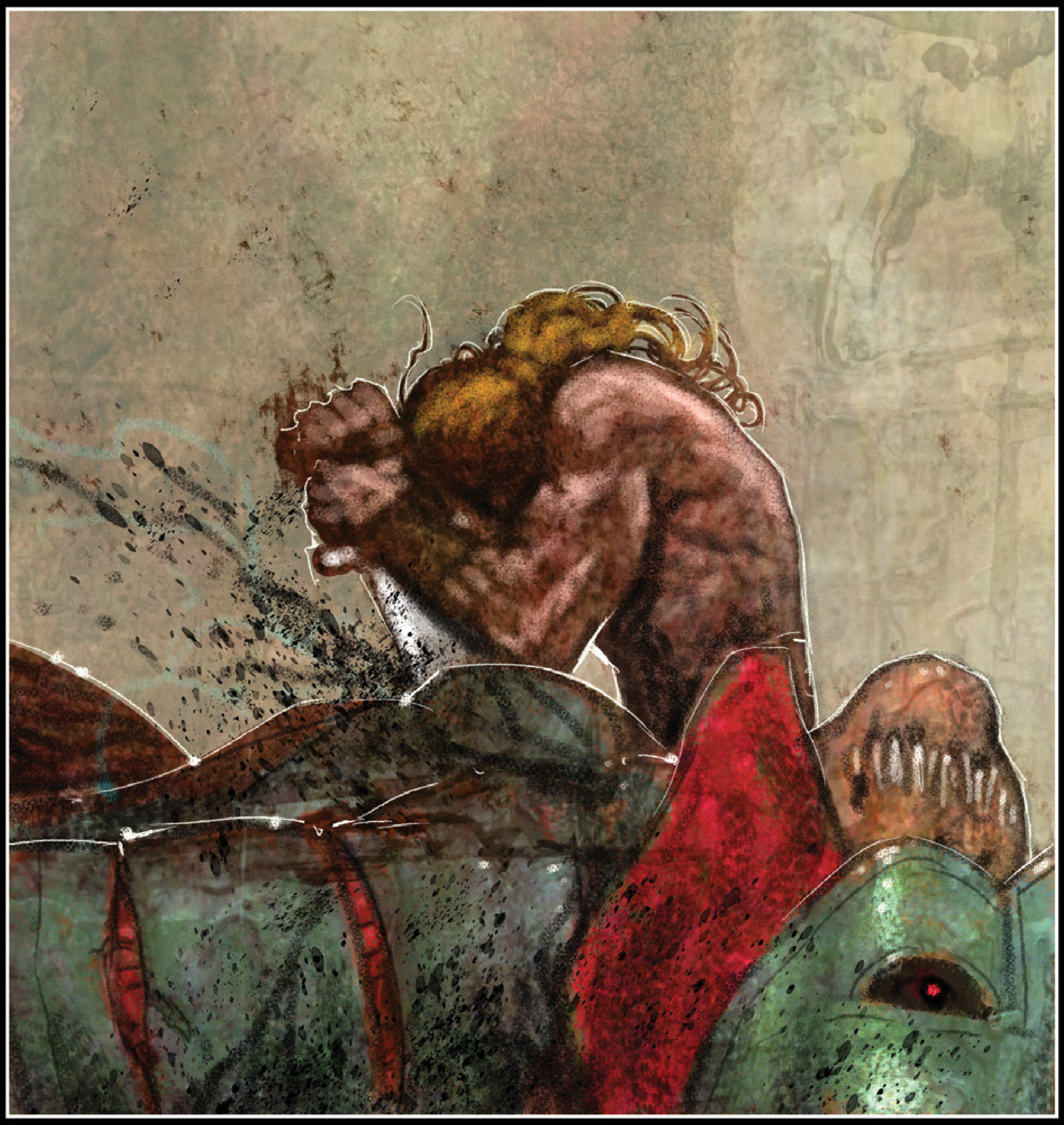
Furious, now, the queen picked a second champion.

And this was how Arthur came to face a giant in his own halls. A knight of surpassing stature, with eyes that glowed like coals, and blades, the length of a man, for hands!

Brutal was their duel, raging along the parapets high above the ramparts, to the dank deeps of the great caverns that once housed dragons below the keep.

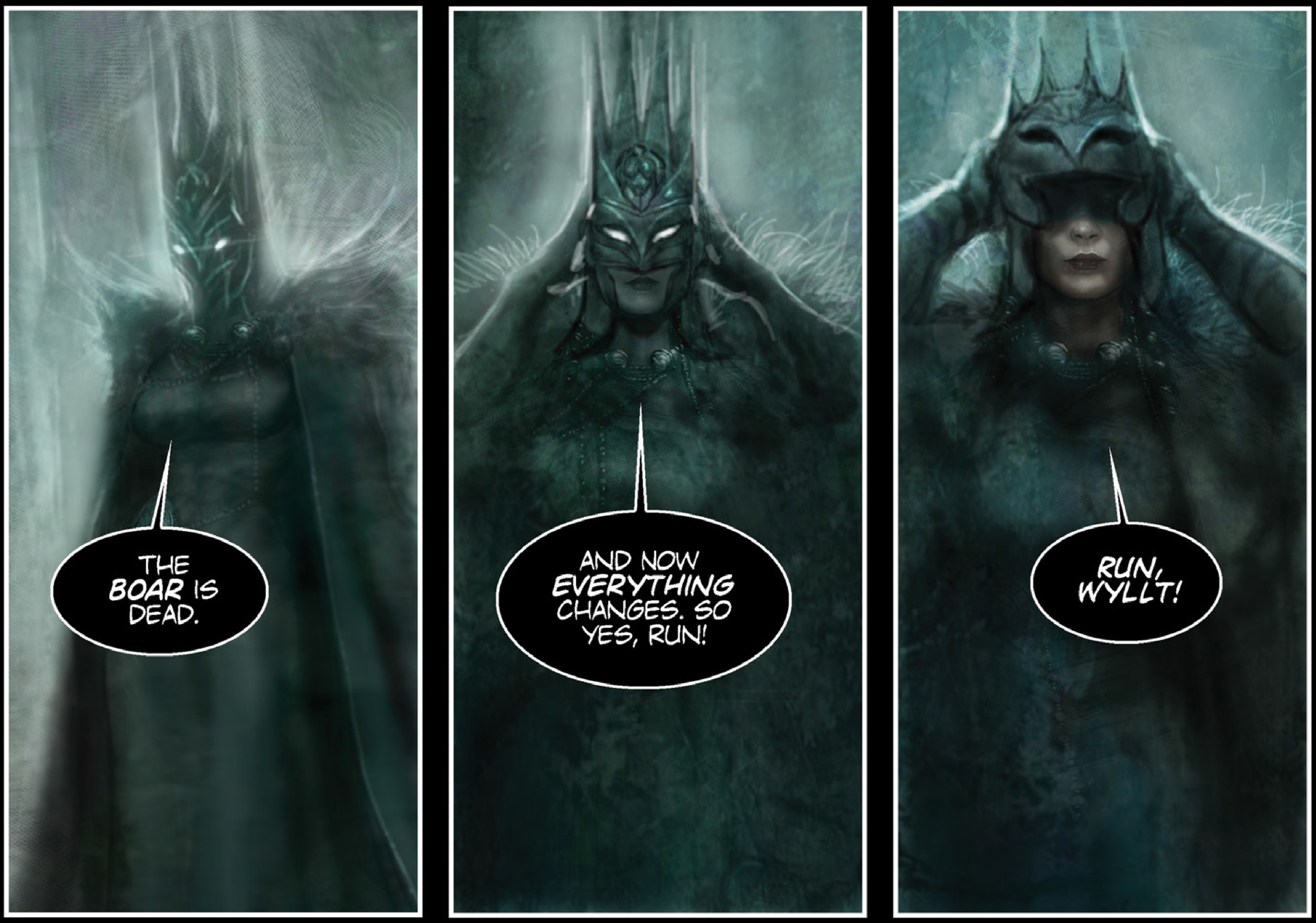
So fierce were their clashes that the earth could be felt shaking, even on the Island of the Manx, where the vast waves thrown up by the conflict threatened to sink it!

Was it not said that the kings of Britain were the children of the gods? And indeed, Arthur did battle like Mars himself that day! Until finally...



Yet in that moment, when victory should have been assured and peace at last restored to our blessed lands, the corpse of Modred, possessed of a dread hatred, raised itself one last time...
DON'T YOU GET IT UNCLE?!!? YOU'RE JUST A PATHETIC RELIC!!!
UHN...
BUT...
MERLIN... ? I... I thought...

Driven mad with despair, Merlin fled the castle...
...transforming as he went into the guise of an elk.
Freed, for a while, of the troubles of humankind.


THE BOAR IS DEAD.
AND NOW EVERYTHING CHANGES. SO YES, RUN!
RUN, WYLLT!

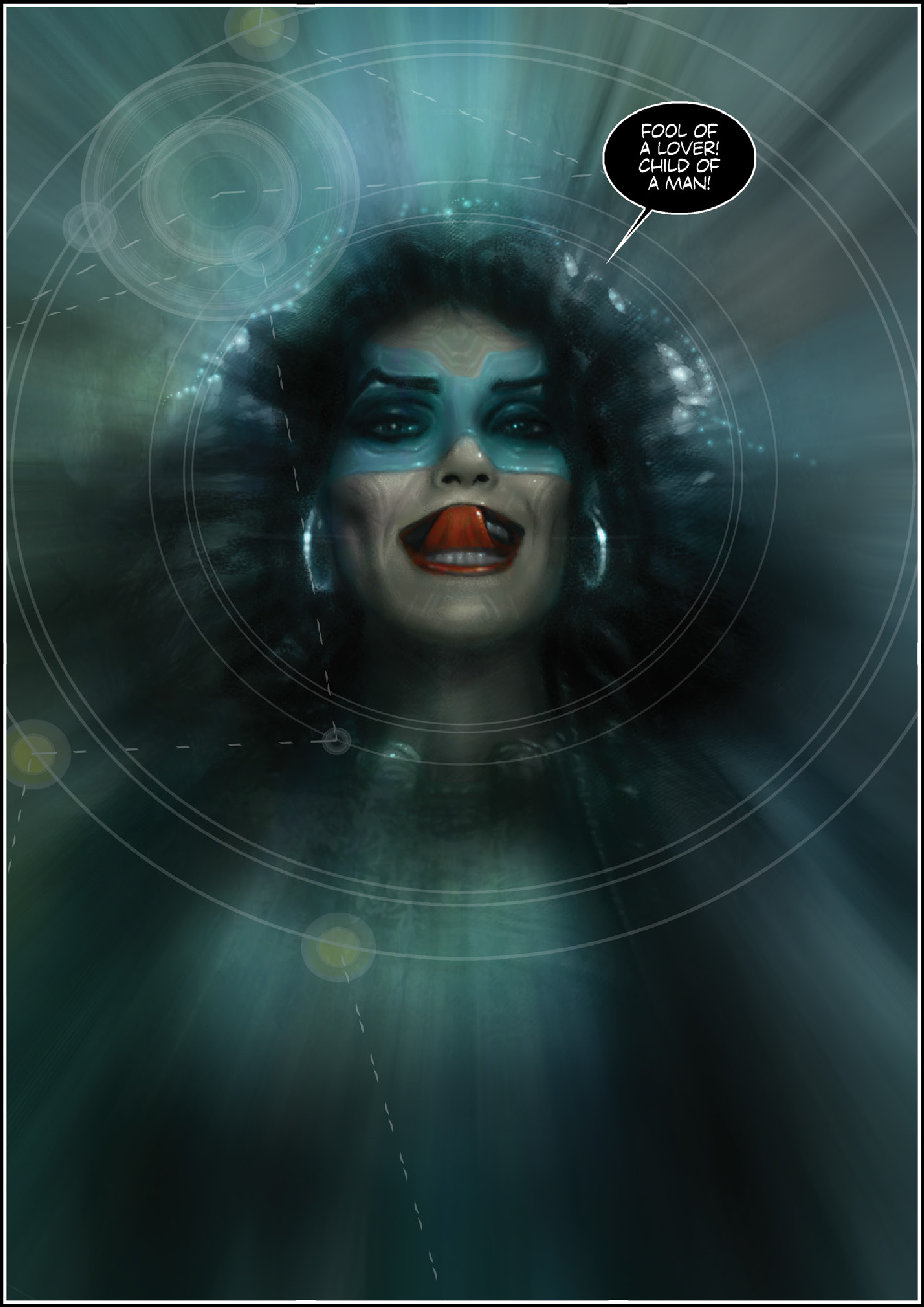
Later I would learn many things...

That the dark queen and Merlin had a history.

That Guanhumara had had many names over many thousands of years.

But poor Merlin was disadvantaged, for at that time he did not himself know it.

Nor of the price he would pay in the learning of it...


FOOL OF A LOVER! CHILD OF A MAN!

It would be be decades before he found out.

His dim beast's mind led him back to her.

And she, knowing him, thought to make an end of things.

He was impaled with a spear, hounded into a brook in the woods, where he once more became a man and called out to her - only to be struck unconscious with a rock and finally drown...

AFTER THAT, MUCH WAS TO CHANGE. THE DARK QUEEN TOOK THE THRONE FOR HERSELF.

With the Saxons, Scots, Picts and Hibernians under her control - turned near mindless, helpless in their adulation - she set about subjugating all that stood against her.

And wielding arcane powers the likes of which none had ever seen, she began to wipe out anything that might one day best her.

All things magical - the Boggarts and Pixies, Brownies, Dwarves, Selkies, Knockers, Spriggans, Goblins, Bogies, and Trows, anything that might stray from the realms of the Fae - would be slaughtered without mercy.

Even the healing light of the sun began to shun this island realm. Our water grew dank, our crops, diseased. The rivers filled with the corpses of cattle, sheep and men.

It has been some fifty years since her reign began, and yet she has not aged a single day.

For my part, I fled back to Wales, to this desolate, grey-slated place. The animals here let me know if danger approaches. There's a spring of still-fresh water that feeds the river in the valley. But I have, until you came, barely cast eyes upon another living soul.

It was said the queen intended to do as Arthur had planned - to take her conquests across the sea, and to do unto the world what she did here!

It may be that she already has! I know not.

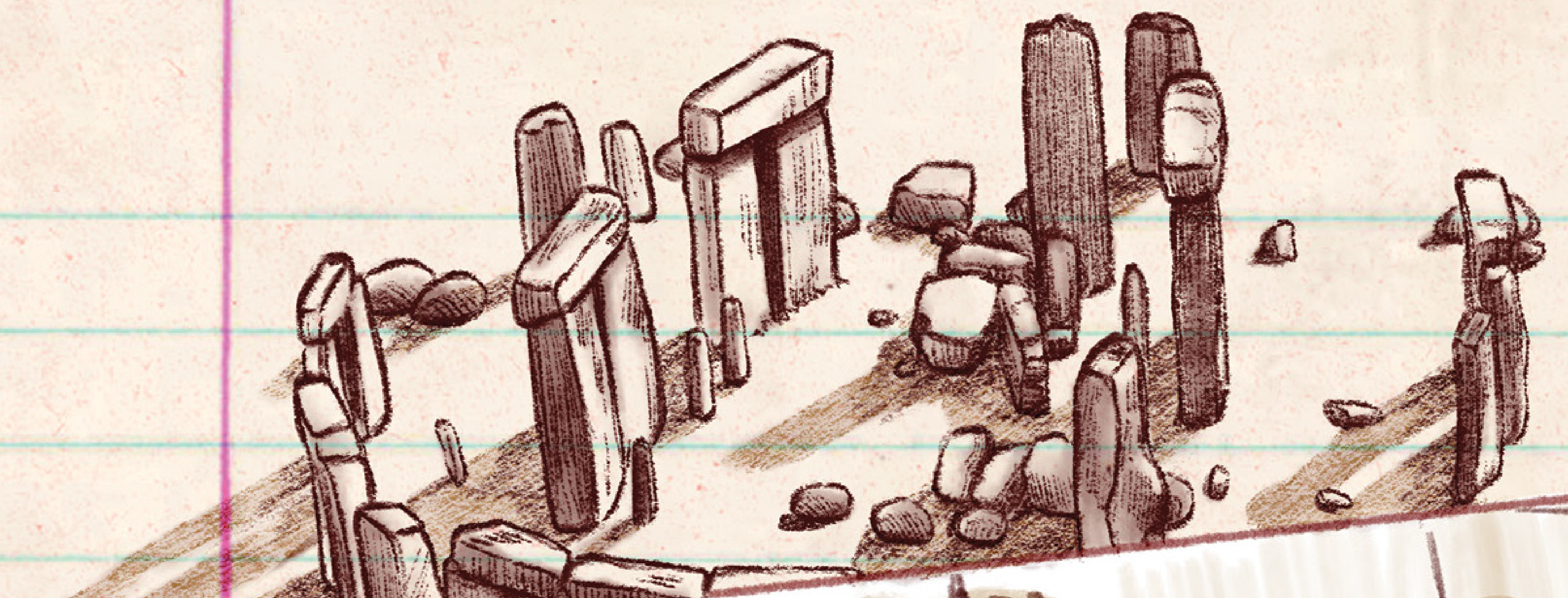
I have been a coward.

My life was given to documenting our times, not shaping them. I have hidden here, where I dream of better days long gone.

AND THAT WAS IT. CONVERGING TIMELINES. EVERYTHING COMING TOGETHER... THE 'HOWS' IF NOT THE 'WHYS'. WE WERE IN THE FIFTH OR EARLY SIXTH CENTURY. AND EVERYTHING HAD TURNED OUT ROYALLY BOLLOXED. DARYL COULD OBVIOUSLY SENSE MY NEED TO KNOW MORE. HE FINALLY OBLIGED.
YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S TIME. THERE'S SO MUCH YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND.
AS I ONCE SAID, AMBER - I WAS A SHAPE-CARK.
AND - LIKE MERLIN - I'M FROM THE FUTURE TOO.
I WAS ONE OF THE FIRST THE UR-QUEEN SENT BACK - BUT ORIGINALLY SHE NEEDED TWO OF US: A MER-SEEK, TO NAVIGATE TIME, AND FIND OUT EXACTLY WHERE THE CAST WERE DOING THEIR WORST DAMAGE. AND A SHAPE-CARK, TO FIGHT THEM.
THE MER-SEEK, ANA, AND I HAD BEEN SENT FAR FURTHER BACK THAN WYLLT (WHO WOULD BECOME KNOWN AS THE MERLIN, NOT JUST A MER-LIN) AND IT WAS ONLY A FEW DAYS BEFORE ONE OF THE MOR-DREADNAUGHTS FOUND US...
IT CAME. I FOUGHT IT.
AND ANA DIED.
I WAS IN SHOCK, BUT I FOUGHT ON. I HAD TO! BUT I WAS JUST NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO... TO BEAT IT. TO WIN THAT BATTLE. IT ENDED... BADLY.
FOR CENTURIES I ROAMED, AMNESIAC, COMPLETELY ALONE.
FOREVER GROWING OLD. DYING. REGENERATING...
ONE LIFE LEADING TO ANOTHER...
ONE FAMILY AFTER ANOTHER...
UNTIL I EVENTUALLY MET...
...TALIESIN.

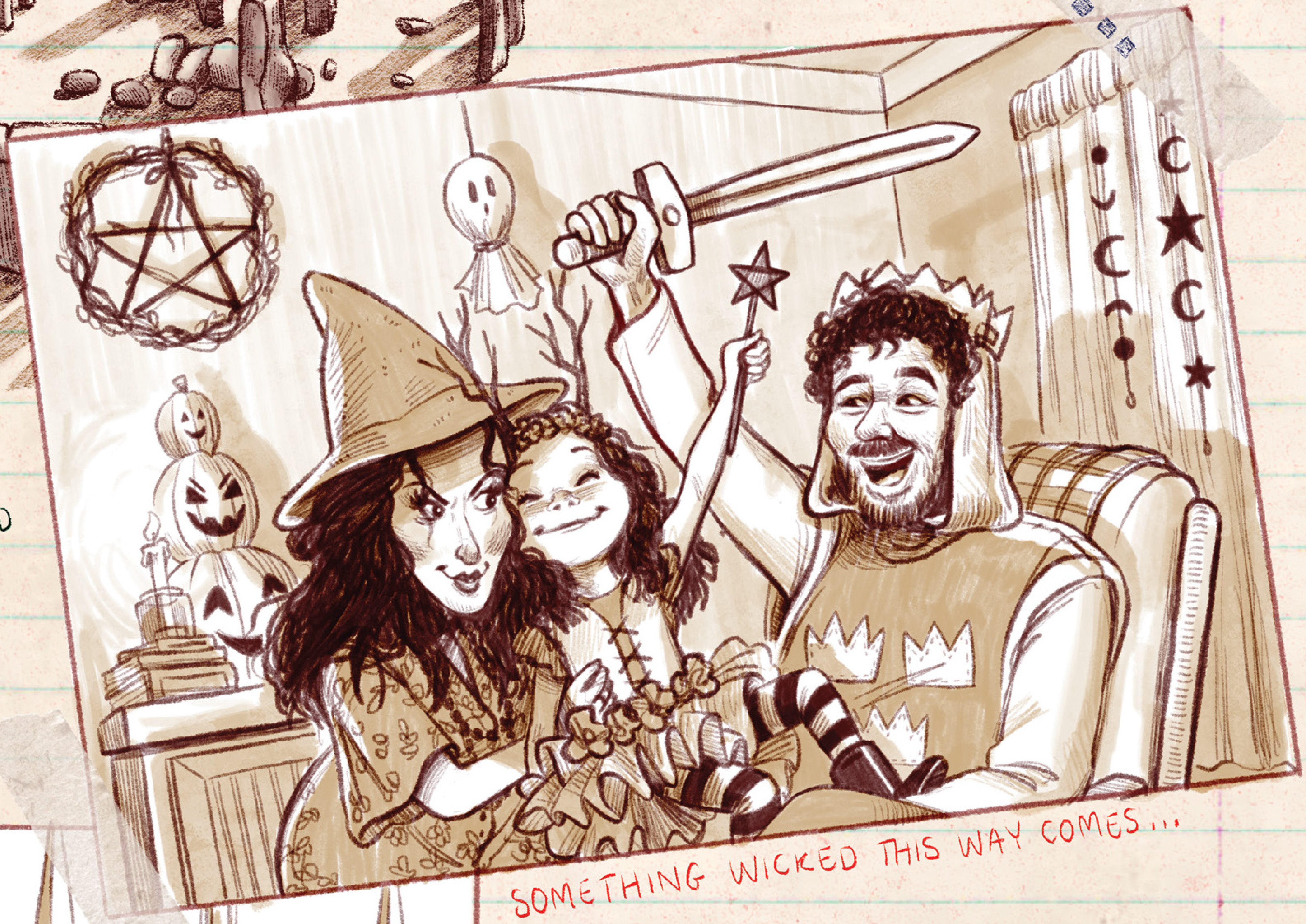
AND THAT'S WHEN I BRIEFLY GOT MY LIFE BACK. TALIESIN, KNOWING MERLIN, SAW ME AS I AM.
MERLIN HAD CONFIDED IN HIM. HE ALONE KNEW THE STAKES. WHAT WE SOUGHT TO ACHIEVE.
MY **COMIC** WOULD PISS PEOPLE OFF.
IT WOULD BE A CONVOLUTED MESS OF INFO DUMPS, FOOTNOTES AND SIDEBARS, DRAWN IN RANDOM ARTSY STYLES, AND DESIGNED TO CONFUSE EVEN THE MOST ARDENT MORRISON FAN.
I WOULDN'T KNOW HOW ELSE TO TELL IT.
HOW AN ***UR-QUEEN*** FROM THE FUTURE APPEARED TO ME AS A *DRYAD*, AND SENT ME *BACK IN TIME* BEFORE SHE DIED...
HOW I MET **TALIESIN** (WHO I LOVE, BTW) AND HOW MY BOYFRIEND TURNED OUT TO BE ***HIGHLANDER.***
(SORT OF)
AND **STILL** - WHAT THE *BLOODY HELL* DOES ANY OF IT HAVE TO DO WITH ***ME?***
SERIOUSLY?
NERDY Mc NERD FACE
I heart tarot cards
WELL...
I 'THINK' I'M STARTING TO FIGURE THAT BIT OUT TOO. AND JUST LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, *IT'S COMPLICATED!*
SEE...
I 'THINK' THE TIMELINE THAT LED TO THE ***KNIGHTS OF THE VELDT*** DIED WHEN ***ARTHUR*** DIED.
ALSO...
MY *MUM AND DAD?* THEY FUCKING KNEW SOMETHING.

TRAVEL



ALL THOSE TRIPS TO **STONEHENGE** WITHOUT ME...

THEY NEVER EXPLAINED THAT - AND THEY ***KNEW*** I WANTED TO GO SO BADLY...

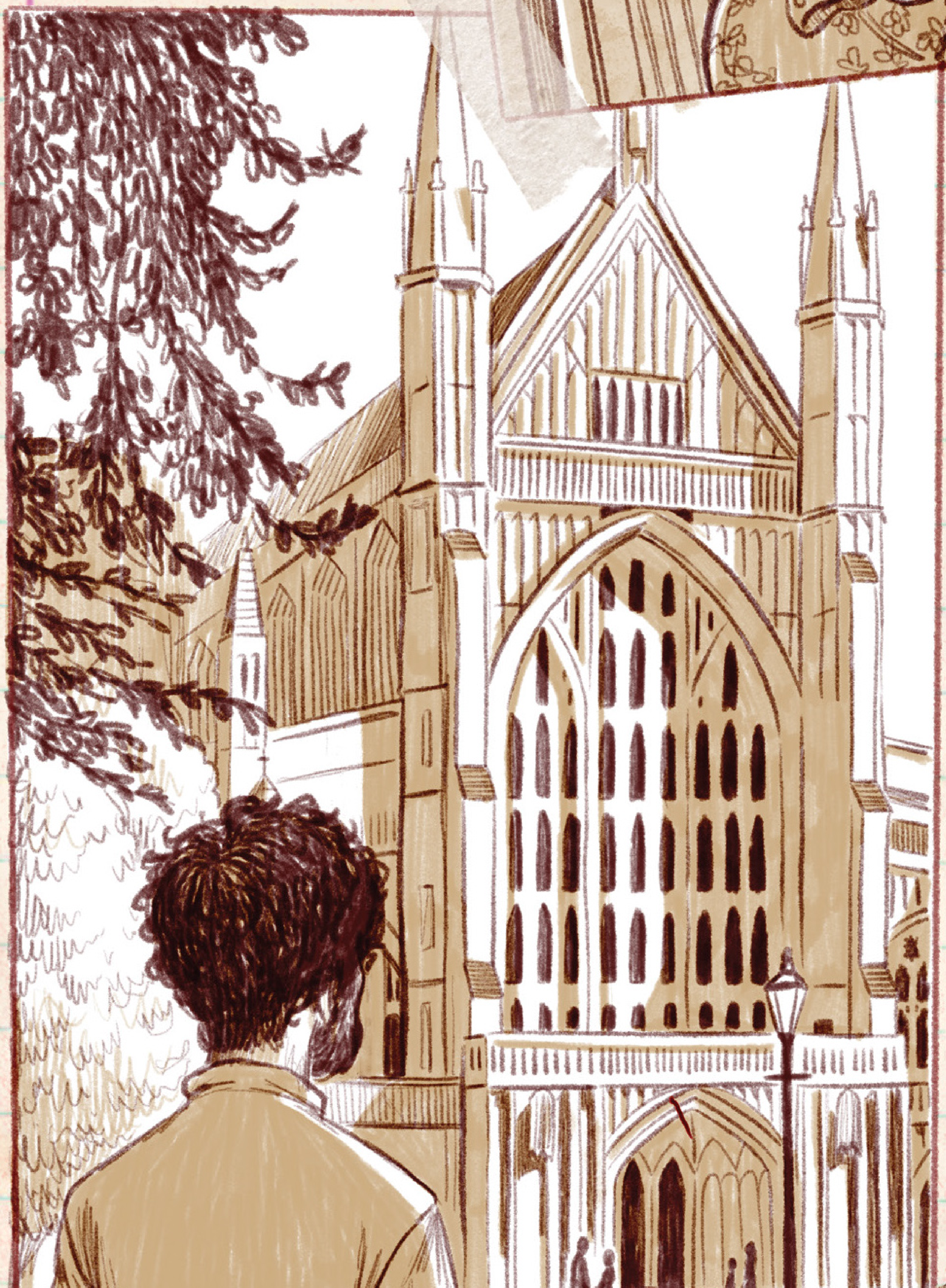


SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES...

MUM → ← DAD

NO ME! :(

MARRIAGE



THEY EVEN GOT **MARRIED** THERE!

AND DAD'S OBSESSIONS -

THAT **MERLIN** WAS A REAL BLOKE, AN ACTUAL, HISTORICAL FIGURE.

(IT WASN'T JUST *NIKOLAI TOLSTOY* THAT BELIEVED THAT. WANT TO KNOW MORE? READ ***THE QUEST FOR MERLIN!***)

HE TOOK US TO LOTS OF OTHER SITES ASSOCIATED WITH **KING ARTHUR** -

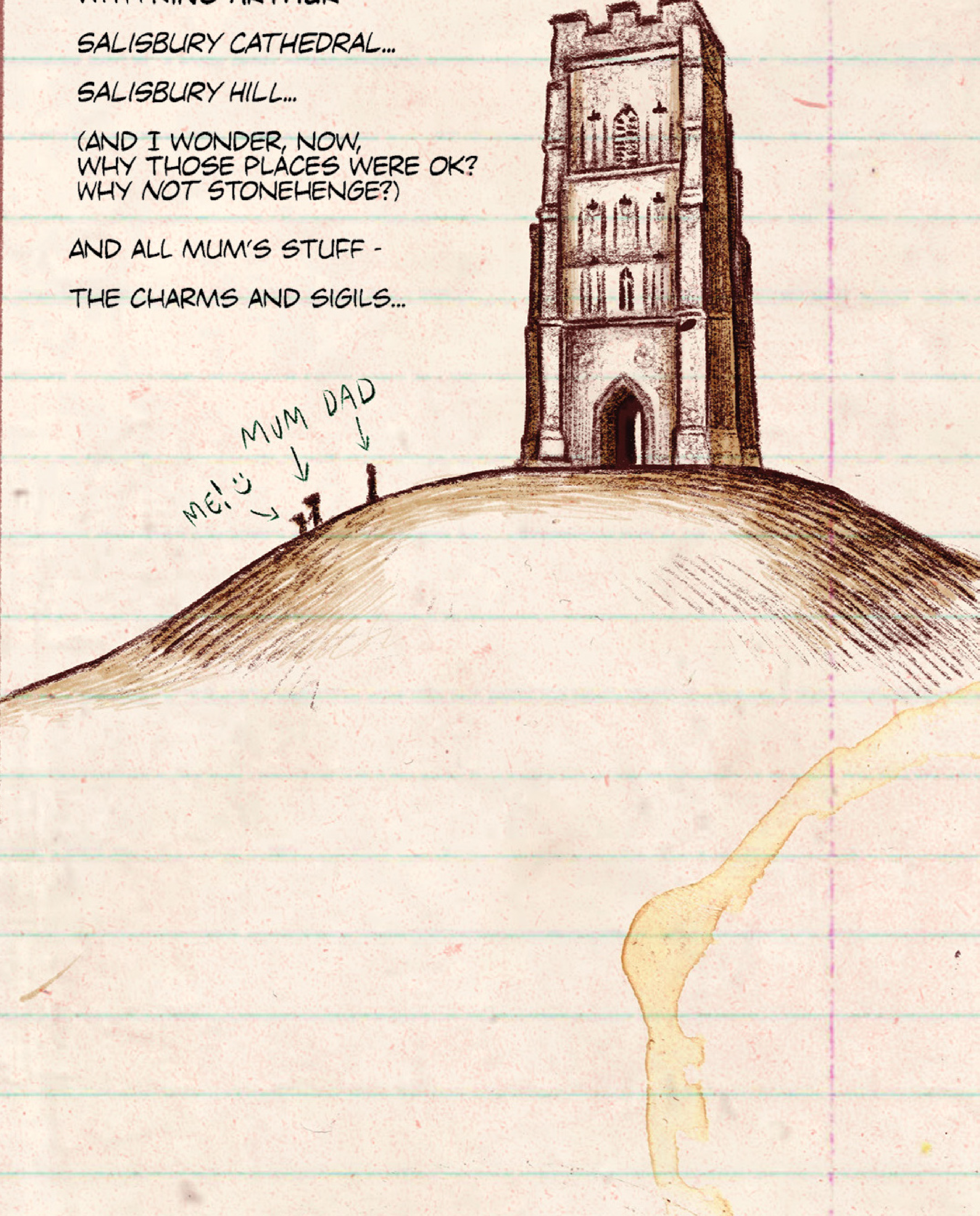
SALISBURY CATHEDRAL...

SALISBURY HILL...

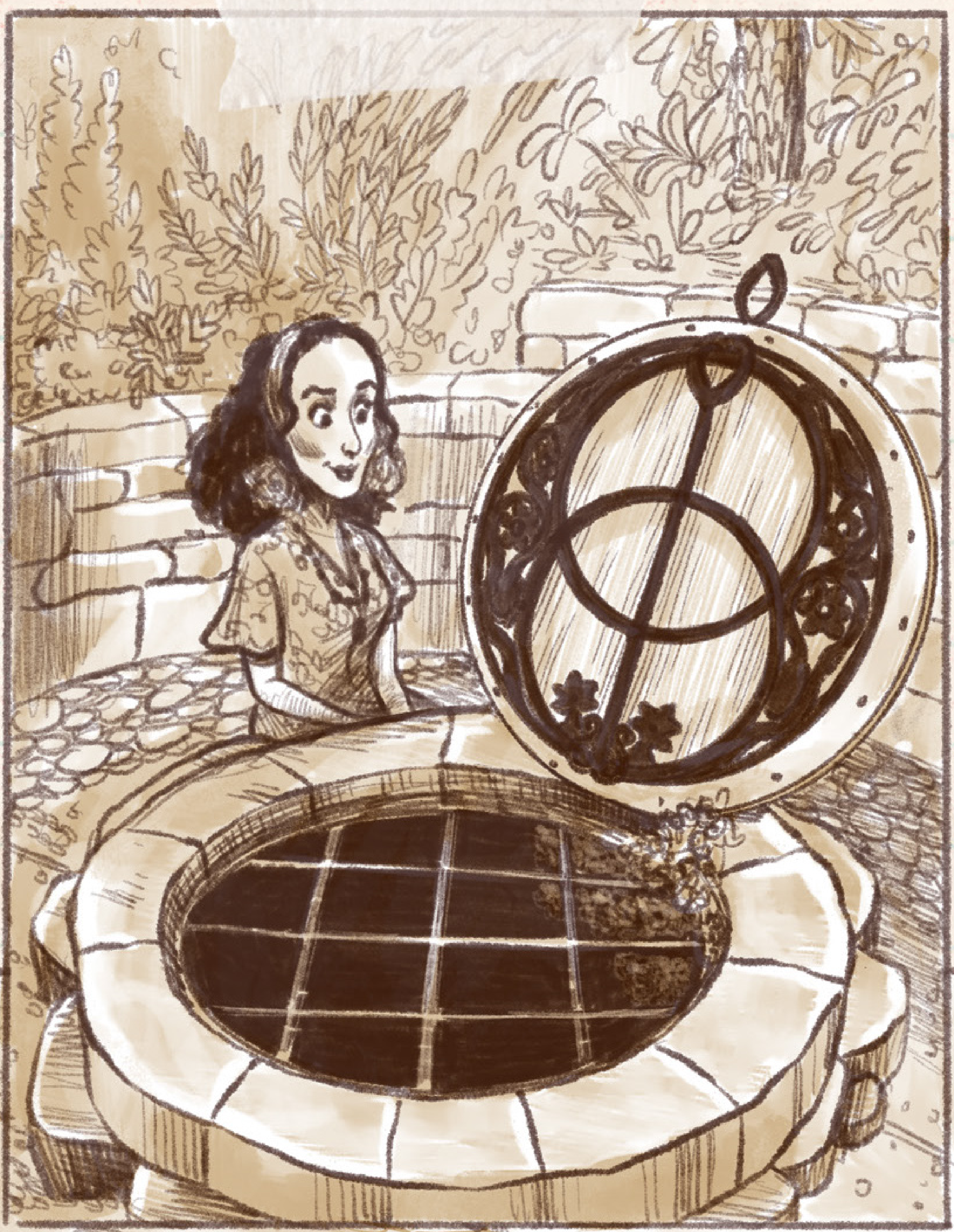
(AND I WONDER, NOW, WHY THOSE PLACES WERE OK? WHY *NOT* STONEHENGE?)

AND ALL MUM'S STUFF -

THE CHARMS AND SIGILS...



PEACE



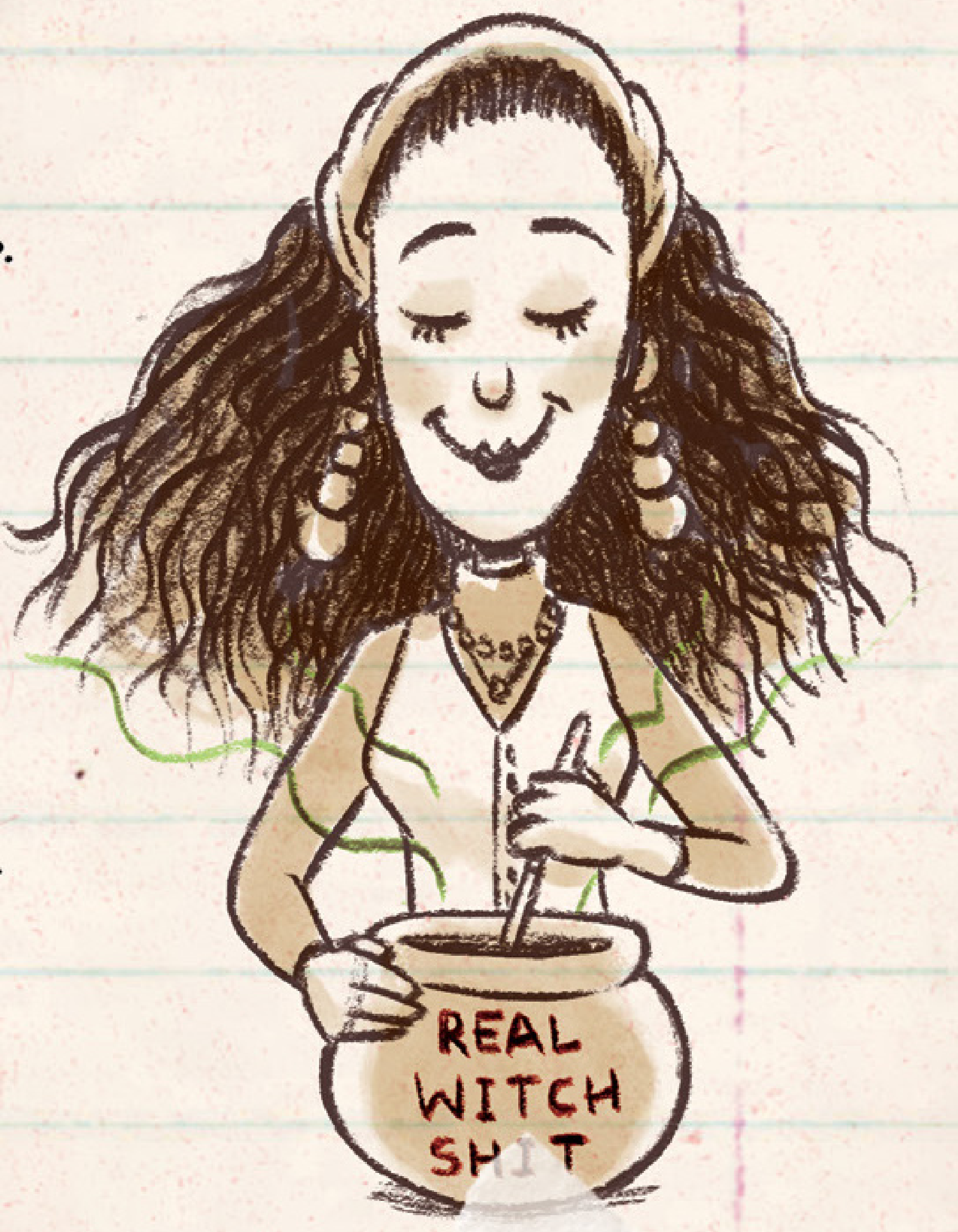
FAIRY TOILET?

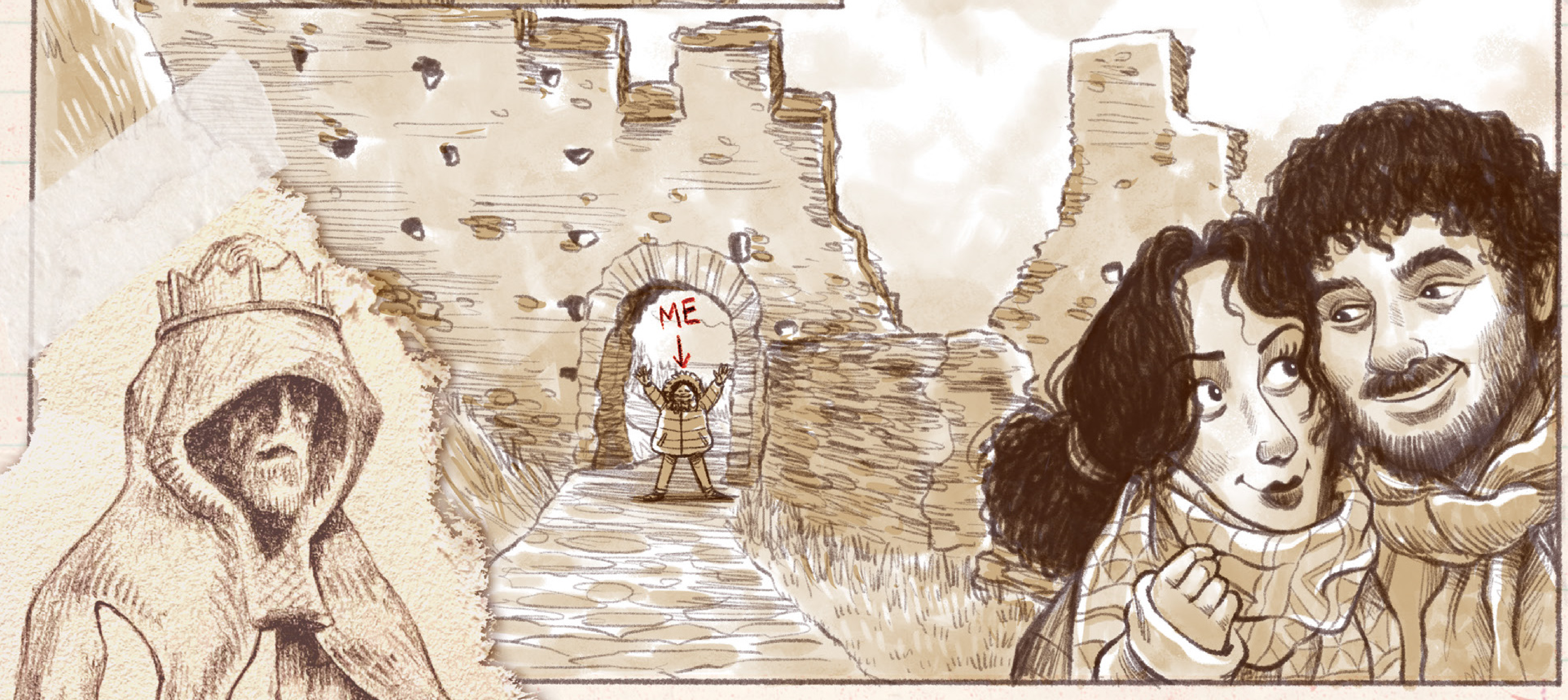
MUM REALLY LOVED THE **CHALICE WELL**. SHE'D GO OFF AND MEDITATE WHILE ME AND DAD WANDERED AROUND THE GARDENS.

AND THEY TOOK ME TO ***TINTAGEL*** TOO...

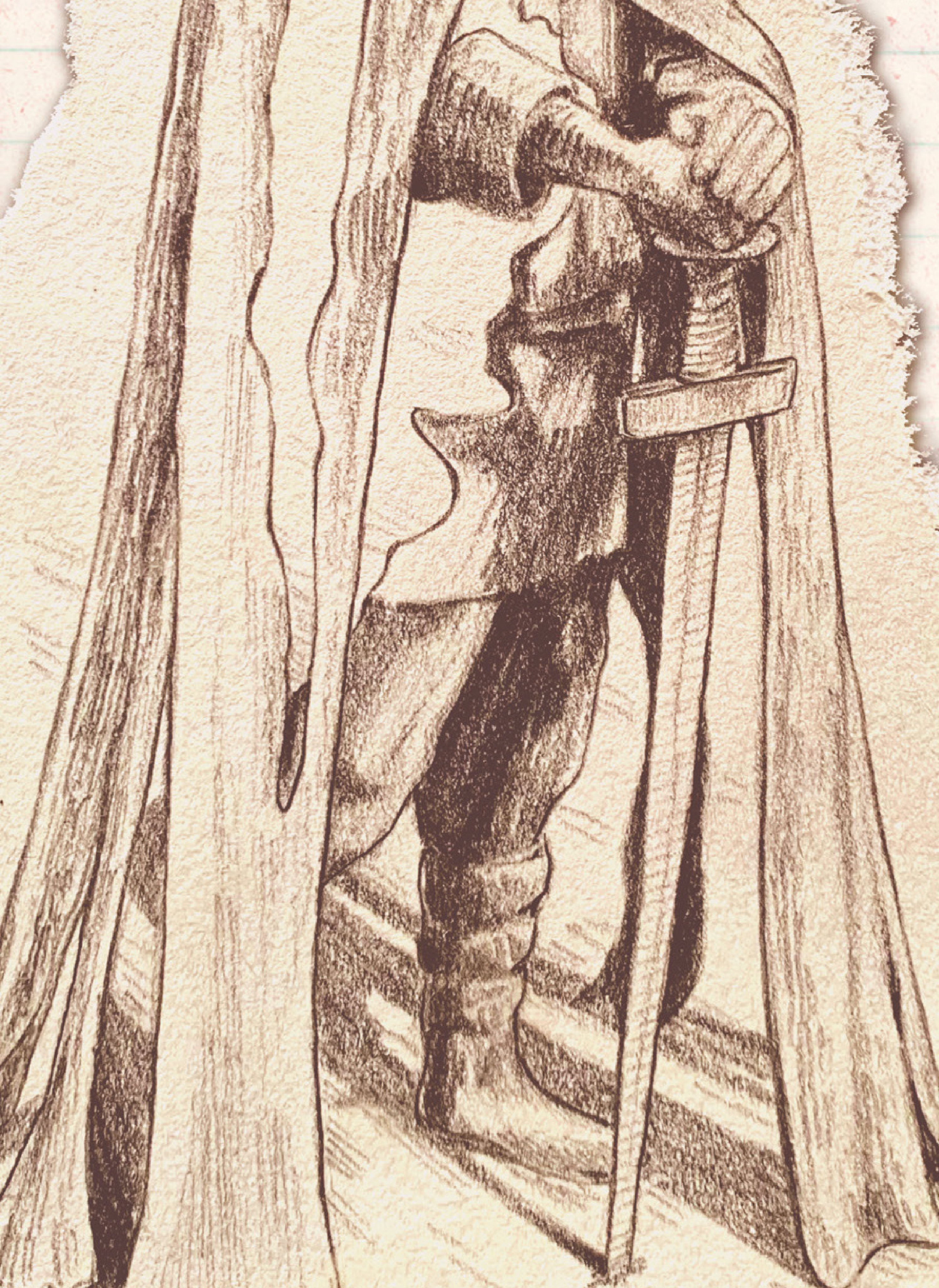
MUM TALKED ABOUT THE *WITCHES MUSEUM*, AND HOW SHE CAME FROM A LONG LINE OF MAGES...

I THOUGHT IT WAS COOL. :-)





GOD, I LOVED MY MUM AND DAD. :-(

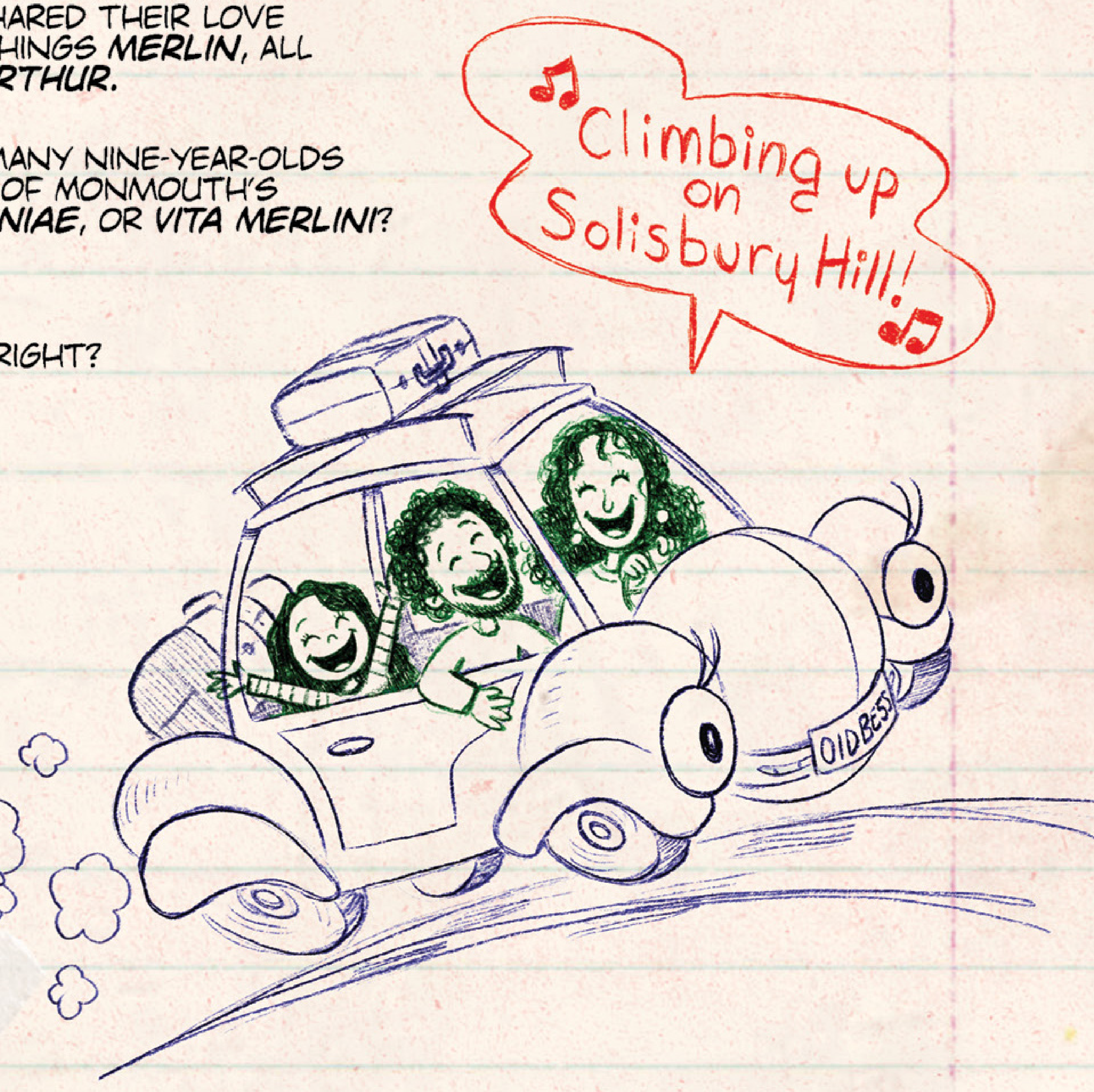


MUM WOULD SAY THERE WERE MESSAGES IN ***EVERYTHING*** - THAT YOU COULD READ, IF YOU KNEW HOW. IF YOU HAD THE *GIFT*.

THEY WERE SO DELIGHTED THAT I SHARED THEIR LOVE FOR ALL THINGS ***MERLIN***, ALL THINGS ***ARTHUR***.

I MEAN - HOW MANY NINE-YEAR-OLDS READ GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH'S ***REGUM BRITANNIAE***, OR ***VITA MERLINI***?

I KNOW, RIGHT?


♫ Climbing up on Solisbury Hill! ♫
OIDBCS

AND I KNOW ONE OF THOSE BASTARD **MOR-DREADNAUGHTS** CAME FOR THEM. MAYBE IT WAS LOOKING FOR **ME?**
BECAUSE NOW WHAT THE **UR-QUEEN** TOLD ME MAKES SENSE.
BECAUSE, YOU SEE... I THINK I WAS THE **FIRST MER-SEEK.**
BORN WITH THE POWER TO MANIPULATE **TIME.** A **WEAVER** OF IT. ABLE TO **STOP** IT - TO TRAP THINGS IN BUBBLES OF IT, JUST LIKE **AMBER.**
MY OWN *NAME* WAS A MESSAGE TO ME.
MY PARENTS KNEW WHAT I WAS.
AND SOMEHOW - DOWN, BACK THROUGH THE AGES - THE **UR-QUEEN** KNEW ALSO.
BUT SO DID THE **CAST.**
AND WHEN THEY CAME...
SO **SHE** CAME...
IT WAS ALL SHE COULD DO, AND IT WAS SUCH A RISK. BUT SHE DID IT ALL THE SAME.
JUST AS IT HAD BEEN WHEN SHE SENT BACK HER ONLY SON, AND IN DOING SO USED THE LAST VESTIGE OF **MAGIC** THAT EXISTED IN HER TIME.
HE DID NOT KNOW IT. BUT IN SENDING HIM BACK SHE ALSO *SAVED* HIM. IT WAS AN ACT OF *LOVE.*
IT'S WHAT PARENTS DO FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

TALIESIN - I HAVE TO TELL YOU SOMETHING. UNTIL I HEARD EVERYTHING IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE. BUT I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT. THE UR-QUEEN TOLD ME I HAVE TO FIND HIM... I HAVE TO FIND MERLIN...
SO I THINK... I THINK HE MIGHT STILL BE ALIVE... SOMEHOW...
OH, BUT HE IS, SWEET GIRL! QUITE ALIVE.
HE SPENT SOME YEARS - DECADES IN FACT! - AS A FISH.
A CARP AS IT HAPPENS, BUT I THINK I'LL SAY A SALMON.
THE SALMON OF LLYN LLYW WAS SAID TO BE THE OLDEST AND WISEST OF ALL BEASTS. THEY ALSO TRANSFORM... DID YOU KNOW THAT?
BUT COME! COME MEET HIM! CONSIDER YOUR SEARCH OVER BEFORE IT YET BEGAN!

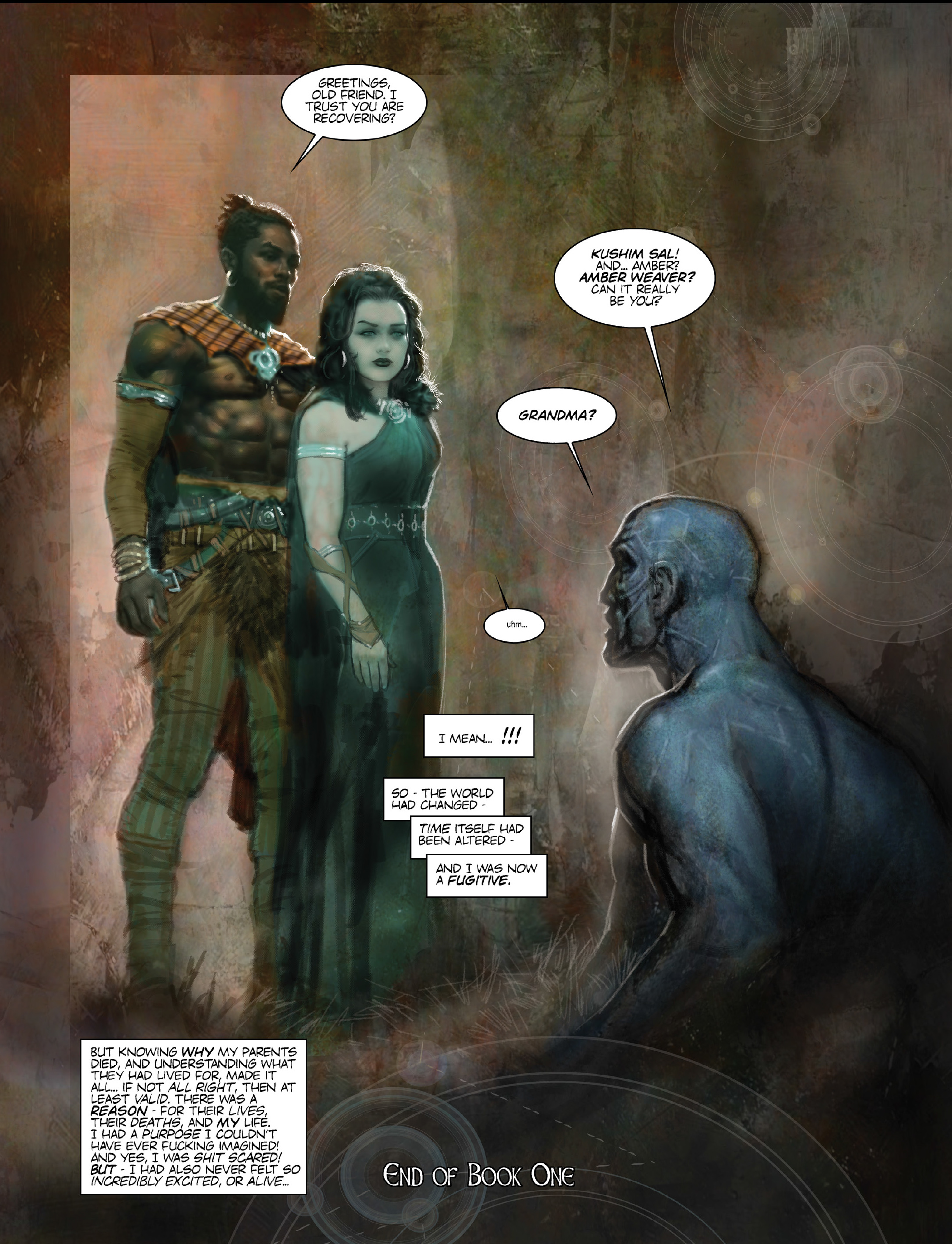
AND THAT WAS WHEN I FIRST MET ***MERLIN!***

THE MAN AT THE HEART OF ALL THINGS I EVER LOVED.

ALIVE.
REAL.
HERE.

NOTHING, YOU'D THINK, COULD EVER SURPRISE ME AGAIN!

(YOU'D *THINK*, RIGHT?)


GREETINGS, OLD FRIEND. I TRUST YOU ARE RECOVERING?
KUSHIM SAL! AND... AMBER? ***AMBER WEAVER?*** CAN IT REALLY BE YOU?
GRANDMA?
uhm...
I MEAN... ***!!!***
SO - THE WORLD HAD CHANGED -
TIME ITSELF HAD BEEN ALTERED -
AND I WAS NOW A ***FUGITIVE.***
BUT KNOWING ***WHY*** MY PARENTS DIED, AND UNDERSTANDING WHAT THEY HAD LIVED FOR, MADE IT ALL... IF NOT *ALL RIGHT*, THEN AT LEAST *VALID*. THERE WAS A ***REASON*** - FOR THEIR *LIVES*, THEIR *DEATHS*, AND ***MY*** LIFE. I HAD A *PURPOSE* I COULDN'T HAVE EVER FUCKING IMAGINED! AND YES, I WAS *SHIT SCARED!* ***BUT*** - I HAD ALSO NEVER FELT SO *INCREDIBLY EXCITED, OR ALIVE...*
END OF BOOK ONE

AFTERWORD

I was going to talk about the origins of this material, how it came about and why. Of my love for mythology in general, and my quest to find out more about the origins of myths and folklore nearer to my home in the UK, not just the classical material of Greece and Rome that inspired my interest. I was going to talk about epic poetry, and car journeys to ancient sites. How I retraced the path trodden by a true scholar of Merlin, and visited the possible sites of ancient, forgotten battles, and hermit holes that just maybe the wizard had once inhabited.

I was, but then I thought I should let the work speak for itself. All the references are here. If you are inspired to learn more about Merlin, then I'm thrilled this book has ignited in you what other works ignited in me. It is, after all, part of a lineage. We keep these stories alive by revisiting them, and passing them on. And what a journey I've had! I have wanted to do a comic utilizing Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of the Merlin/Arthur story for some 40 years, and finally I have! But I want to talk about how it became so much more than that - to me at least!

Both my wife, Christina, and my great mate, Nick Abadzis, helped push me to make this tale my own. Without them I don't think there would have been an Amber, who grounded the whole thing, and seemed to spring, fully formed, out of nowhere. She made it contemporary, and gave the saga a fresh spin - and a third timeline. And with her came Daryl, and a thousand other possibilities.

There were, it's true, times when this whole thing seemed like folly. Too big, too unwieldy, too ambitious. For my first fully solo outing to attempt not only to tell such a vast tale, but also to be about storytelling and comics, was perhaps a little bonkers! But then, when you're making truly personal work it's best to be authentic, and to do it with heart - do what you love - even if it risks derailing itself.

When I look, for example, at works like Bill Sienkiewicz's astonishing 'Stray Toasters', I see material that thrills me, even as it confounds. It's worth working at it, and unpacking the numerous layers bit by bit. It's a work that is truly joyous in its vast variety of techniques and approaches. And I wanted to try that too, with a story that I felt could justify it. StarHenge does so many things we are not supposed to do. Somebody wrote rules, but it's up to creators to always challenge them, and rewrite them.

My book breaks the fourth wall, knows it's a comic, is riddled with info dumps, it tells AND shows, and is chockablock full of different artistic approaches. We know from issue 2, and even issue 1, that Amber is an artist. That she processes everything through art. It's a well-known psychological method used to deal with trauma after all, so it seemed like it could work. And she loves comics, so that lens gave me a reason to attempt that approach. And we know different comics tell stories in different ways, which meant I could, for instance, make an action scene using a very old-school, mainstream approach. A historical scene might look like a Victorian neoclassical painting. Stripping the world of color could help delineate a timeline, but it could also show how a character might feel, or view the world. So it became a way to explore the inner world of the characters, and all their psychological messiness and complexity.

But I also did something else that I have forever wanted to try, and that is, to make this work something like a hybrid between a comic and an illustrated book.

Sometimes words do things that pictures can't. And I love words. And at other times the opposite is true. So there could be silent sequences, and wordy sequences. There could be wild, semi-relevant diversions, as Herodotus did in his dubious histories. There could be an internal commentary. There could be genuine quotes and references to cultures both ancient and modern, to juxtapose the differences and the similarities, and hopefully inspire at least a few people to check them out. But there could also be humor, and playfulness. There had to be, as it all risked being incredibly ponderous, and not a little pompous. I really didn't want that! So attempting to make it fun to read was a huge part of the process.

In the end I am sure it is flawed, and likely uneven. When you move into new territory there really is no map, no plan, no rules. When you are trying things you've never done before, sticking the landing - even page to page - is not something you can readily predict! You inevitably break things. But you also learn, and grow, and hopefully improve. There's no way of knowing what's right if you haven't done it wrong - unless, of course, you just except the established rules of any given medium as sacrosanct, and opt never to find out for yourself. But then I always like to ask the 'why' about things, and to find out for myself, because times and approaches change, and sometimes what we're told is the right way is itself eventually considered wrong. How else do we push any medium? How else do we grow as artists, and continue to learn?

I suspect it will be some time before I can personally unpack this book, and see with some clarity what worked and what didn't. For now though I'm too close, too steeped in the madcap journey. But what I hope is that I don't lose my nerve, and stop pushing so hard going forward. I don't want to ever play it safe with StarHenge, tempting though that is! And I hope, as I grow, that you'll join me.

Thank you for supporting my book. I made it for me, but it couldn't exist without you.

Liam Sharp

THE MYRDDYN SCRIPT

About ten years ago, when I was the co-founder and CCO of Madefire – a digital storytelling start-up that was exploring the notion of digital first comics, where we pioneered a form of storytelling we called 'motion books' – I returned to a subject very close to my heart: Merlin.

I had forever wanted to do a version of his story that utilized more that just the standard tropes, mostly derived from Sir Thomas Mallory's 'La Morte d'Arthur'. I wanted to incorporate ideas proposed by Nikolai Tolstoy in his book 'The Quest For Merlin', and use as my main source the much early work of Geoffrey of Monmouth in his 'Historia Regum Britanniae' (History of the Kings of Britain) and 'Vita Merlini' (The Life of Merlin), written in the 1100s, and the first works to ever feature the wizard.

Motion books did not have pages as much as animated sequences, so the following script is not a standard comic script in that sense. The sequences here would have worked almost like a scene in a TV show or movie, but apart from that slight deviation it is largely the same as a comic script.

My hope, at the time, was that we might persuade Simon Bisley to produce the art. I had dreams of a very authentic work rendered in a powerful, bombastic style. Something worthy of the attention of serious Arthurian scholars, that would nonetheless be engaging enough visually to encourage broader, less specialized readership. (As you'll note, a small number of these sequences made it into StarHenge relatively unscathed!)

In the end we never did make the Myrddyn motion book, but it nevertheless provided the jump off point for the book you now hold in your hands. Enjoy!

Liam Sharp

MYRDDYN: The Dragon and the Boar

SEQUENCE 1:

It's twilight. Two badly beaten men - one an aging noble, the other a powerful Germanic Chief - are being dragged through a temporary soldier's camp. Hearty, battle-worn warriors jeer as they pass. The men are *Vortigern the Thin*, the king, who is about to pay dividends for an old grievance, and *Hengist*, his Ally, a pagan, and the ruler of Kent.

Caption (Myrddyn VO): Had I, *Myrddyn*, not prophesied this?

Close on Vortigern, resigned to his fate but defiant.

Caption: Had I not, in the heat of my uttering, informed old *Vortigern the Thin* that the threat from Constantine's sons was *immediate?*

Caption 2: That Aurelius, Uther and Constans had fitted out their ships, left Armorica in France?

Caption 3: That they sailed for Britain?

Vortigern and Hengist are thrown unceremoniously to the puddled and bloody earth.

Caption: That they intended to attack the *Saxon people*, and to conquer that race they so detested?

Pull back. We see Vortigern at the booted feet of his nemesis, Aurelius, the son of the old king Constantine, and brother of Uther, and the puppet king Constans - whom Vortigern had eventually disposed of. Aurelius is a powerful and popular leader, but still a grim and haunted figure.

Aurelius: Is this truly *he?*

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE 2:

Aurelius grabs the now-kneeling Vortigern by the chin, looking right into his face. Vortigern grits his teeth, staring back defiantly.

Aurelius: Is this *scrawny old man* Vortigern, the bastard overlord of the Gewissei, who murdered my father Constantine, and made a simpering fool out of my pathetic brother, Constans?

Vortigern: Mock me all you like, Aurelius! I was... just a *Welsh chieftain*, nothing more. And yet--I rose to become *king of all the Britons*! What's done is done...

On Aurelius, brow furrowed, mouth turned down in disgust.

Aurelius: Perhaps. But my father ruled peaceably for *ten years!* Where is that harmony now, *king?*

Aurelius picks up a large sword...

Raises it high...

And beheads Vortigern.

Aurelius rests on the hilt of his sword, introspective.

Aurelius: Hm. So much for your *Welsh dragon!*

Caption: Welsh Dragon?

Caption 2: Ah yes! Yes! I recall it!

Caption 3: The *red dragon!*

Caption 4: This much, too, I had predicted...

Aurelius kicks Hengist brutally.

Hengist: Uhff...

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE 3:

On Aurelius, holding Vortigern's severed head up to face Hengist, who shows no emotion. (Parallax?)

Aurelius: Was it worth it, Hengist?

Aurelius 2: How many *British noblemen* died that *you* should rule Kent?

Aurelius 3: No doubt you'd set your sights on Vortigern's crown...

Hengist: I have no regrets. I lived well while I yet lived. I will be honoured as a king in my next life, deep below this earth...

On Aurelius.

Aurelius: Ha! You *pagans* and your *beliefs!*

Aurelius 2: It may be, as they say, that you *do not fear death...*

Aurelius wipes a nasty looking knife, grim resolve clouding his features. This will be a brutal death for Hengist.

Aurelius: ...but *all* men must surely fear *dying*.

Aurelius 2: And even more--the *method of it...*

Caption: Yes. All this I uttered as prophecy,

Caption 2:long ago,

Caption 3: while I was still a *fatherless youth...*

SEQUENCE 4 (originally Sequence 2):

Myrddyn (Merlin) a near-naked old lunatic in animal fur, talks to a priest - Mungo (otherwise known as St. Kentigern) a portly, but strong looking middle-aged man. They are in a wooded area, and around them are various large stones that might be the remnants of an ancient stone circle. It's a balmy autumn afternoon, and sunlight dapples them.

Myrddyn: Thus am I cursed and blessed by the god *Cernunus!*

Myrddyn 2: I see what is *yet to pass...*

Myrddyn 3: I am a *bad Christian*, father Mungo!

Myrddyn dances about, tragicomically.

Myrddyn: Ohhhh, I have *craved* the peace of your beliefs, but that wretched and forgotten old spirit--*he possesses me!*

Close on Myrddyn, a lunatic glint in his eye.

Myrddyn: And when he does - *I know the secrets of things and the flight of birds and the wandering motion of the stars and the gliding of the fish...*

Myrddin clinging to Mungo's robes, pitiful.

Myrddyn: Bah! It vexes me! He denies me the natural rest of the *merely-human* mind!

On Mungo, intrigued.

Mungo: My dear friend, was it *ever* thus?

On Myrddyn, introspective and calmer now.

Myrddyn: Was I *always* mad?

Myrddyn 2: No. No, I wasn't.

Myrddyn 3: And neither was *Cernunus*--the hornéd god, brother of Bacchus, cousin of Pan!

Myrddyn frowns, pointing a finger at Mungo.

Myrddyn: Pah! You wretched people have made a *demon* out of him—a devil! But he is the *spirit of this island* you know! No good will come of it!

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE 5:

Splash: Myrddyn, young and virile, king-like and intense, stands on a snow-covered mountaintop – probably Snowdon - with the horned god Cernunus. Cernunus is huge, muscular. Part Elk, part man. Wrapped in a bearskin and hung about with the bones and skulls of animals. His feet are cloven. They are battered by strong winds but seem not to notice.

Caption: There was a time, priest, when he and I would converse as dear friends.

Caption 2: We would chart the rise and fall of man's dominion over man-- play games with them. Their destinies, back then, were as tied to the land as the mist is to the sea...

Cernunus: I feel old, Myrddyn. My ailing joints betray me!

Cernunus 2: Would you believe, my friend, that even such as *I* might crave oblivion?

Myrddyn: I've heard it said that the wind still thinks you a child, and that the mountains have yet to hear your name. You are young yet my lord!

Cernunus: Ha! And you are a *famous liar!*

Cernunus 2: Change comes, Myrddyn! The dragons are all dead. The Great Elk will follow, as must I.

Cernunus 3: It is the natural *order* of things.

Myrddyn: The young eastern god will *never* take this island...

Cernunus: Thus spoke giants, long ago!

Cernunus 2: Don't be so naive Myrddyn!

Cernunus 3: Come now. There is still much to accomplish.

Cernunus 4: The *Cornish Boar's* road must be laid! We must make plans...

Back to Mungo and Myrddyn.

Mungo: *Plans* you say?

Myrddyn hangs off Mungo's robes once more, looking into his face for solace of some kind.

Myrddyn: Wait!

Myrddyn 2: Am I... *coherent*, Mungo?

Myrddyn 3: My eyes grow dim!

Myrddyn 4: I can't tell *what's real*--how can I?

Myrddyn 5: It was th*e battle* that drove me *mad* you know...

SEQUENCE 6 (originally Sequence 3):

Pano - Battle scene! The battle of Arderydd, fought in the north east of Britain over an Iron Age fortress. It's raining and dark, and the surrounding woodland seems full of ominous threats. The sky above is full of thunder, and forms a shape not unlike that of the Horned God Cernunus – but it shouldn't be clear, just suggested... There if you went back looking for it.

Caption: At *Arderydd...*

Caption 2: I instigated a feud over a small fortress--little more than a *bird's nest...*

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE 7:

Back to crazed looking Myrddyn talking to Mungo.

Myrddyn: My lord, my dear and terrifying master, Cernunus, appeared in the sky...

Myrddyn 2: a vast and fearful apparition...

Myrddyn 3: *mocking* me! *Tormenting* me!

Myrddyn 4: And I *fled* then... into *these* very woods...

Close on Myrddyn looking sad, introspective...

Myrddyn: It was the last time I *saw* him.

Myrddyn 2: But he hounded me--in spirit form... chased me for weeks! *Months!*

Myrddyn 3: Until finally he *entered me*, made *me* his house, his *final refuge...*

Myrddyn looking at Mungo like an innocent child.

Myrddyn: You... don't believe me *do* you, father?

On Mungo stroking Myrddyn's head sympathetically.

Mungo: Be at peace, old man. I have heard tell of such things. I do not judge you...

Mungo 2: But please. Tell me more of this *red dragon...*

Myrddyn: You are a saint, Mungo! Saint Mungo of Kentigern, the most patient!

Myrddyn 2: But yes! Yes! I digress!

Myrddyn 3: Forgive me, I am two centuries old, and quite *mad!*

SEQUENCE 8

Wide shot. Back to a frustrated Aurelius, who is overlooking the site of Stonehenge - as yet stone-less - talking to a young and powerful looking Myrddyn, who is dressed to impress – part shaman, part warrior, part chieftain. There are signs of an abandoned construction – a wooden fortress.

Caption: And of *mighty feats*, father Mungo, such as *I alone* could instigate!

Aurelius: Here lie great men, Myrddyn, the butchered victims of Hengist and Vortigern. I weep for them, and all the land demands that I *honour* them.

Aurelius 2: And yet, the *finest engineers in Prydein* are at an impass! They argue over how best to raise a temple! I have no time for them...

Closer on the two men. Myrddyn is looking *very* serious, doing his utmost to impress the king.

Aurelius: I sent for you because I am told you are a prophet, and that you are also the most ingenious engineer in the land. Are you up to the task at hand?

Myrddyn: My king, it is as clear as the water that wells in the underground hollows of Gwent--that can scarcely be seen or felt in a cupped palm, for such is its purity--one structure alone, in all these Isles, will be monument enough for the fallen here...

Caption: How I loved the sound of my own voice in those younger times!

On Myrddyn, waving a hand portentiously.

Myrddyn: The *Giants' Ring*, the mighty Round-Dance Chorea on Mount Killaraus in Ireland!

Myrddyn 2: Those great stones were planted there before the Trojan, Brutus, son of Aeneas, alighted at the rock of Totness and founded Britain.

Myrddyn 3: They must be transported *here*, to this place, where nothing - not man, nor time - will ever shake them!

Myrddyn 4: Furthermore they will cure all who bathe at their bases, for they were carried out of Africa - by *giants!* – and as such possess ancient and powerful properties...

Caption: I recall speaking the words, though where I gained such knowledge is any man's guess!

Caption 2: Either Cernunus inspired me - or I made it all up!

Caption 3: In truth it must be said--I was ever prone to such flights of fancy!

A small fleet of ships heading to Ireland in high seas....

Caption: Regardless, Aurelius decided to trust in my scheme, and I was soon sailing to Ireland in the company of his surly brother, Uther, on a mission to secure and transport the Giants' Ring to Prydein...

SEQUENCE 9

Uther and Myrddyn on the bow of one ship, engulfed in spray. Uther is clearly the brother of Aurelius, and has much of the bearing his more famous son Arthur will have – he's enigmatic, powerful, good looking – but there's something restless about him, and hot-tempered.

Uther: This is a damned fool-hardy waste of time, *wizard...*

Myrddyn: Lord Uther, sire – I am no wizard! And what's more...

Uther: I say you're a wizard, and that my brother is an idiot for listening to you.

On Myrddyn, trying to regain some authority.

Myddyn: The powers I channel are the lays and energies of ancient...

On Uther, in profile, brooding.

Uther: *Silence*, Wizard!

Uther 2: You think I give a damn about such stuff?

Uther 3: I swear, if this *does* prove a fool's errand – and I *highly* suspect it *might!* – your head will be my brother's only reward.

Uther 2: You had better know what it is you are doing, and how best we are to proceed. If the Giants' Ring is all it is said to be then god help you, mage!

On Myrddyn, silent and introspective.

Caption: Well might my lord Uther have been concerned, and with good reason! What could *he* know of the *primordial powers* that I witnessed in *all things?*

Same, but now Cernunus stands behind Myrddyn on the bow.

Myrddyn: You've made me look like a mad fool!

Cernunus: Such is your destiny.

Myrddyn: Well. You'd better be right about this! You have scant enough agents left in this world...

On Myrddyn, alone again, looking out over the Irish Sea.

Pull back. The ships look tiny against a wide seascape.

SEQUENCE 10 (originally Sequence 6):

Close on Gillomanius, the Irish king, laughing uproariously.

Gillomanius: Oh dear... Ha ha! No, *really...*

Pull back. Gillomanius, wiping a tear.

Gillomanius: Uhuh huh... *please...* I beg you... *stop...*

Pull back. We're in the wooden throne-room of the Irish king. Attendants are close at hand, red-haired maidens, a powerful looking queen. Gillomanius is still smiling widely. Before him stands Myrddyn and Uther, plus a couple of other warriors.

Gillomanius: You're... killing me! That's *wonderful!*

Gillomanius 2: Now, seriously... *The Giants' Ring?* And you're just going to... take it home with you, you say? Just dig it up, and away?

Myrddyn: More or less, yes.

On Gilomanius, slightly more serious.

Gillomanius: Well, you're welcome to try! No wonder the Saxons have maintained their rule for so long!

Gillomanius 2: By Cullain's hound, I *do* like a good joke! Come! Dine with me Britons! My home is yours!

Caption: It was not the *last* time my intentions were ridiculed!

Caption 2: Legends are built on the backs of *impossible feats* though, and I was building a legend to span all the future ages of man.

Caption 3: Let them mock, I thought. Soon enough they will learn different...

Caption 4: ...if the words of an old god were ever to be trusted!

Merlin sleeps on a bed of straw, a girl naked beside him.

Closer in on Myrddyn.

He wakes, sweating and terrified.

Myrddyn: Whu... !??!

Caption: Never-the-less, there were nights aplenty when sleep proved an illusive and longed-for respite...

Myrddyn stands naked at the entrance of a small hut. The girl is sitting up, looking at him.

Girl: Are you *a'right* my lord?

Myrddyn: D' you know—the truth is...

Myrddyn 2: I honestly cannot say...

Caption: ...and there were long days when all seemed madness...

SEQUENCE 11 (originally Sequence 7):

Splash. Uther facing Gillomanius on a battlefield. The confer on horseback.

Gillomanius: Are your British stones not *big* enough, Lord Uther?

Gillomanius 2: I liked your story well enough, like, but I can't let you go trampling about all over Ireland with that army of yours now, can I? Wouldn't be proper.

Gillomanius 3: Be a good fella now, won't you? Go home, like I suggested in good faith, and we'll be done with it. Or by the Dagda's great club I'll redden this earth here and now...

On Uther, brooding.

Another huge splash – Battle!

Caption: Whether he liked it or not, *Uther* stood fast to the wishes of his brother--no matter how outlandish those wishes seemed to him!

Splash. Battle! Uther and Myrddyn fighting! Classic Biz-style carnage!

Caption: But then warfare was what Uther excelled at!

SEQUENCE 12

Uther and Myrddyn on horseback looking out at us, expressions of awe on their faces.

Caption: We rested the night. Licked our wounds.

Caption 2: Two days later we arrived at The Giant's Ring on Mount Killaraus.

Reverse angle – big shot. The Giants' Ring – which will be Stone Henge – stands huge and indomitable. Shafts of light illuminate it. Clearly nothing is going to budge it.

Myrddyn: Now *that's* impressive!

Uther: Well.

Uther 2: What now, wizard?

Uther 3: Perhaps you can instruct the stones on how to grow wings and fly back home to Britain?

On Myrddyn, thinking hard.

Myrddyn: Certainly it's a conundrum...

On Uther, smiling darkly.

Uther: Something of the sort!

Uther 2: I'll set about sharpening my sword...

On Uther and Myrddyn facing off.

Myrddyn: You mock me, Uther? I'll wager that I, and thirty men, can do what you and a thousand men cannot – topple these stones!

Uther: Ha! It's not the toppling that concerns me, but everything after that...

Uther 2: Very well. I'll take the challenge!

Uther 3: Men! Tear this child's round-house to the ground! We'll feast on stone tables tonight...

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE 13:

Big. Hundreds of soldiers, trying - and failing - to knock over the stones.

Caption: For long hours they tried, Mungo! Flesh against stone, will against rock! They tried, oh yes! They tried!

On Myrddyn, looking on darkly.

Caption 2: And I sweated.

Same, but Cernunus has appeared again behind Myrddyn.

Myrddyn: What now? I have no idea at all how to move these damn stones...

Cernunus: The largest headstone is unbalanced. It will rock free. Then use the stones against themselves...

Myrddyn: How so?

Myrddyn alone again.

Myrddyn: Cernunus! How so?

Splash. The stones are all down, knocked over like dominoes – but try not to make it look silly! This is an incredible feat. The stones have been used AGAINST THEMSELVES, pulled over with ropes and pullys. Uther looks on with Myrddyn.

Uther: You're not out of the woods yet, Wizard! We still have to get these back to Prydein... I suggest you sleep on that, if sleep you can. I hear you've not been getting a lot of it of late...

Myrddyn: I'll find a way.

Uther: And so you must.

To be continued...

COVER GALLERY

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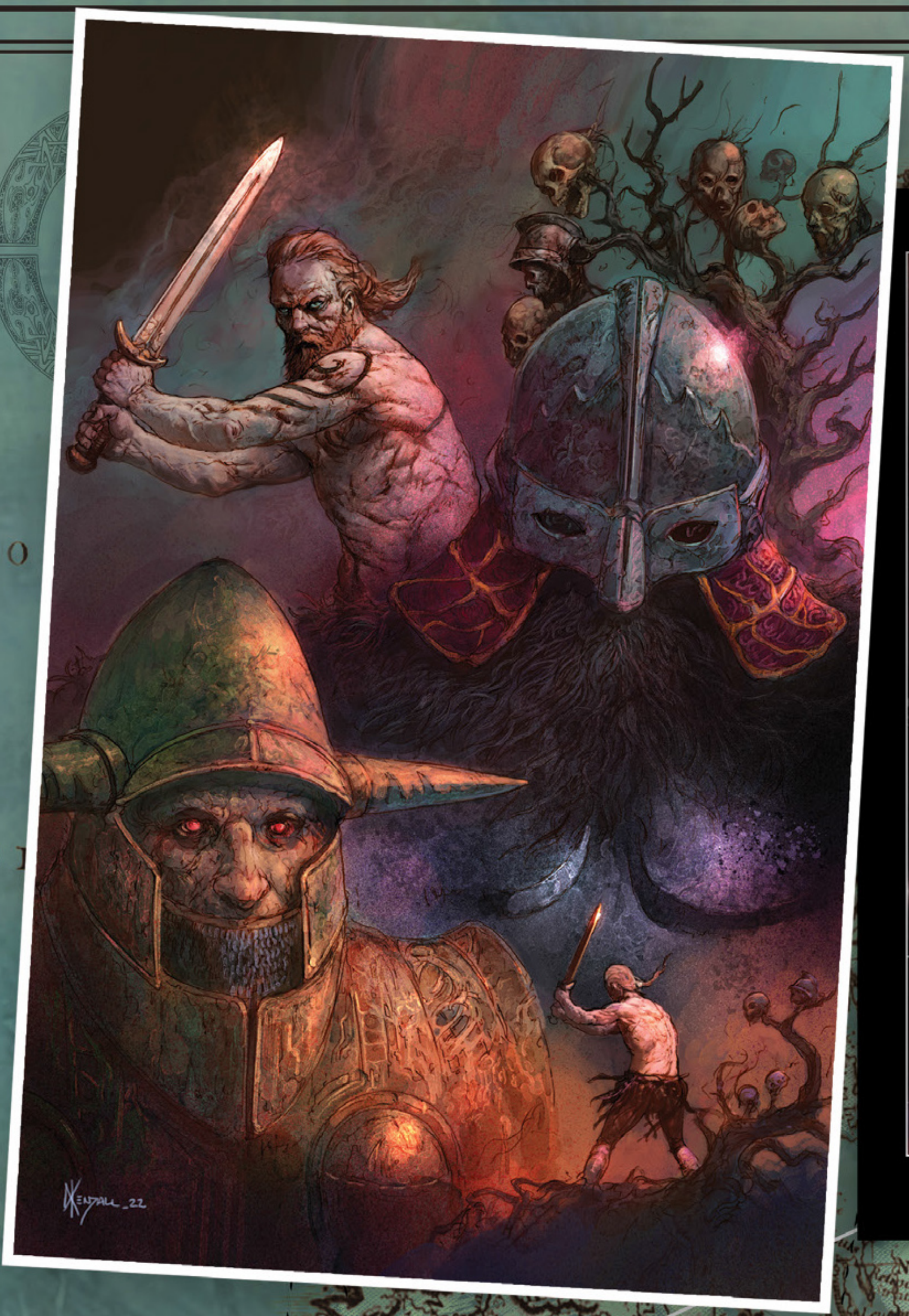
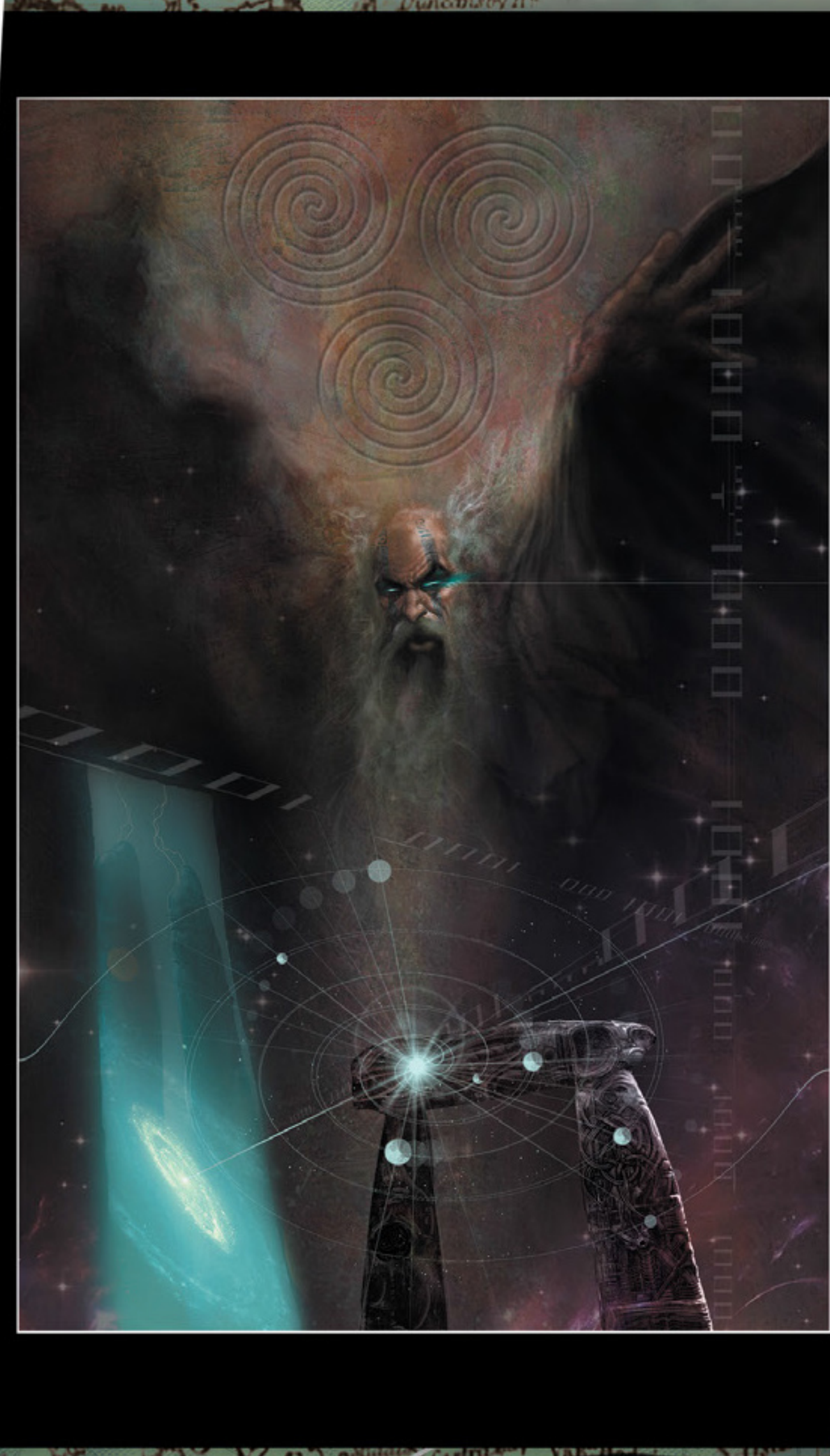
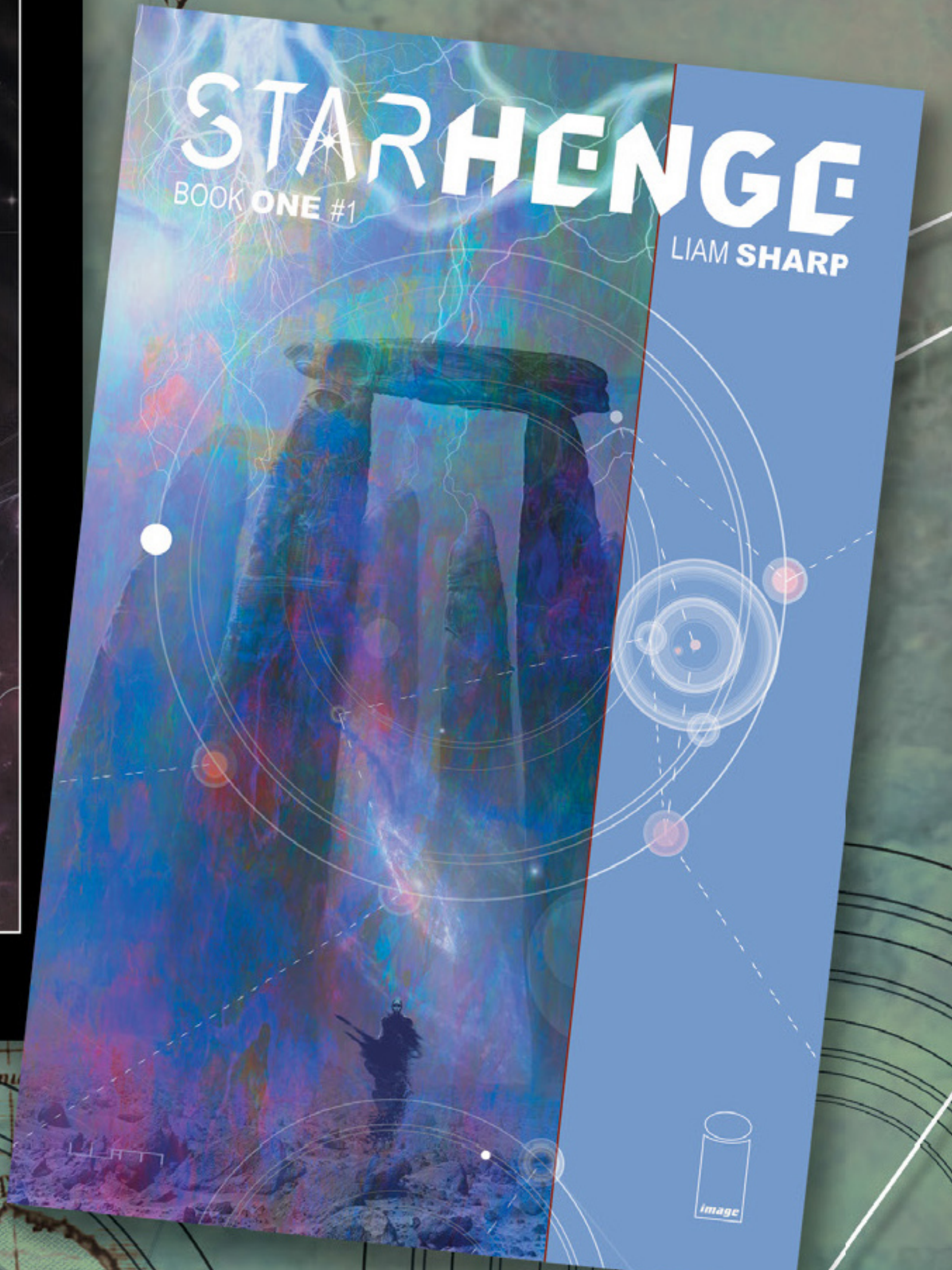
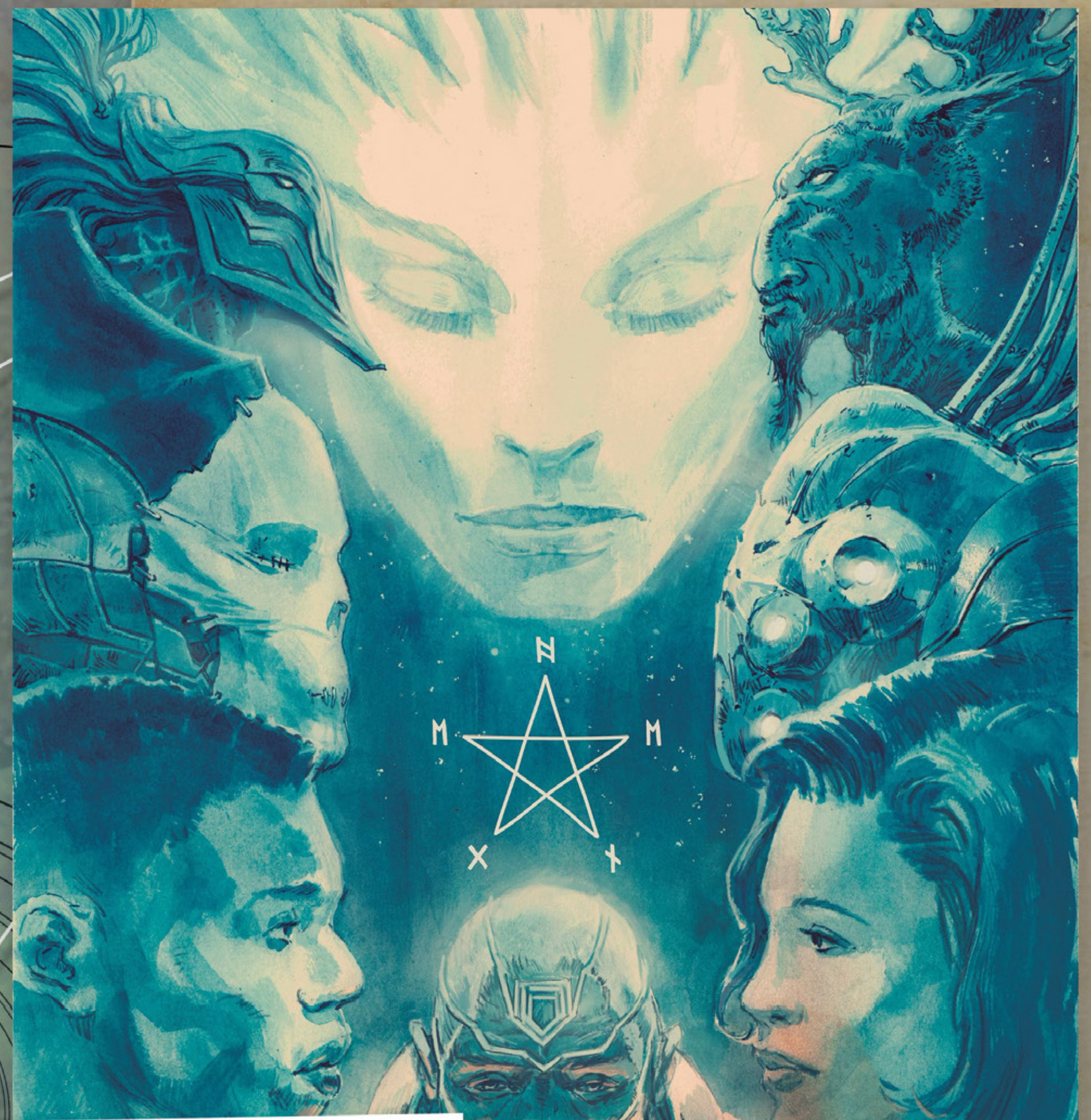
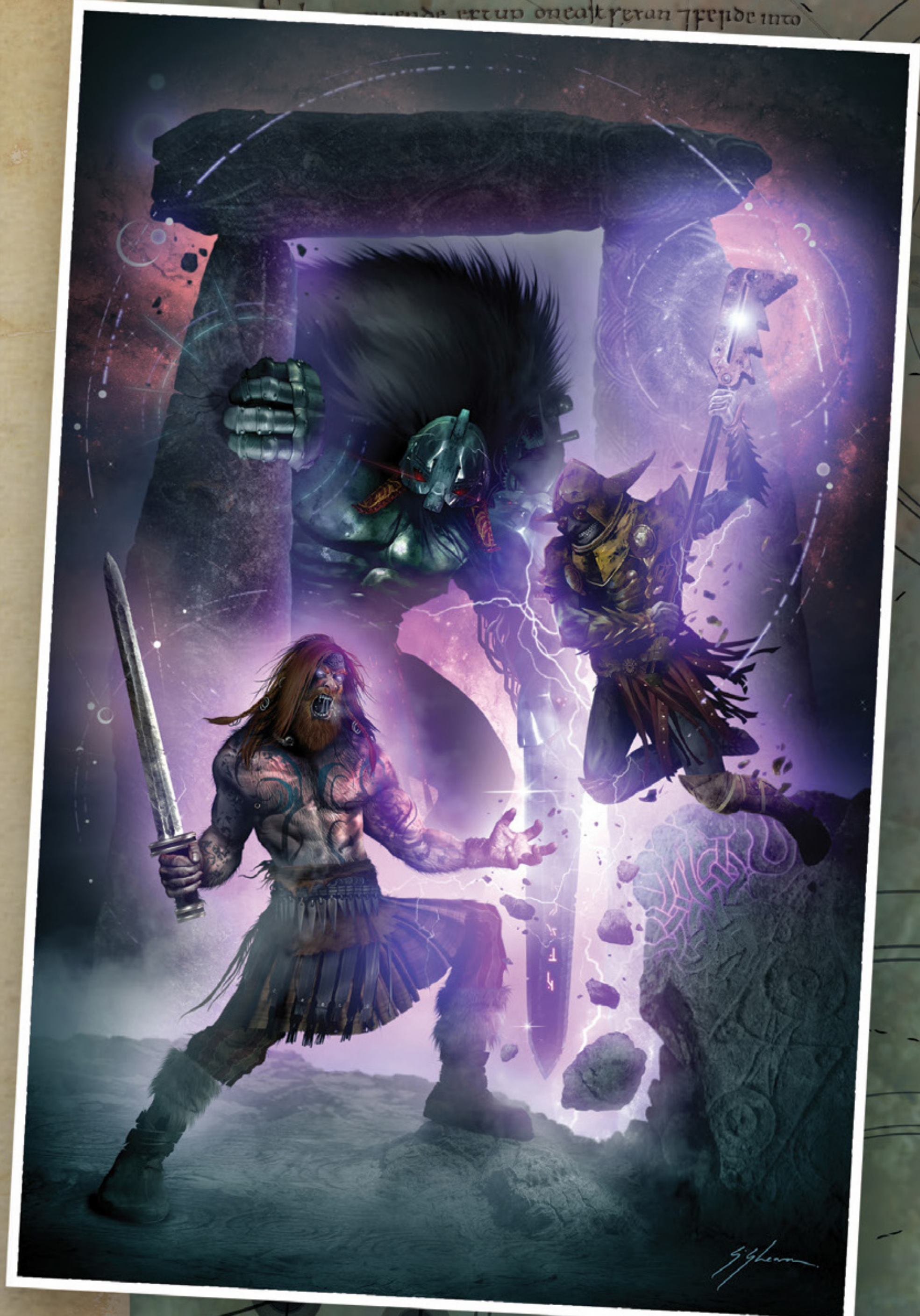
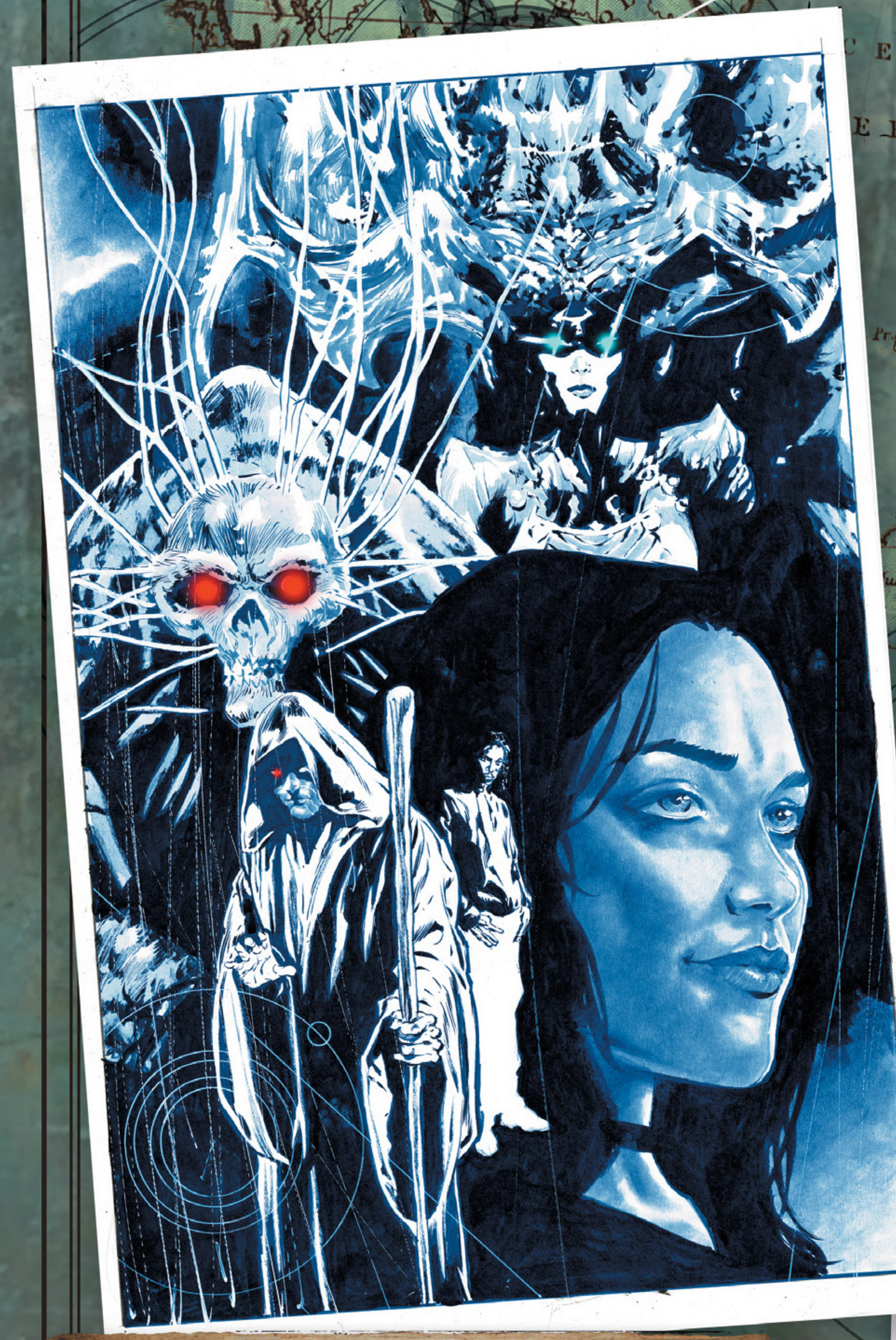


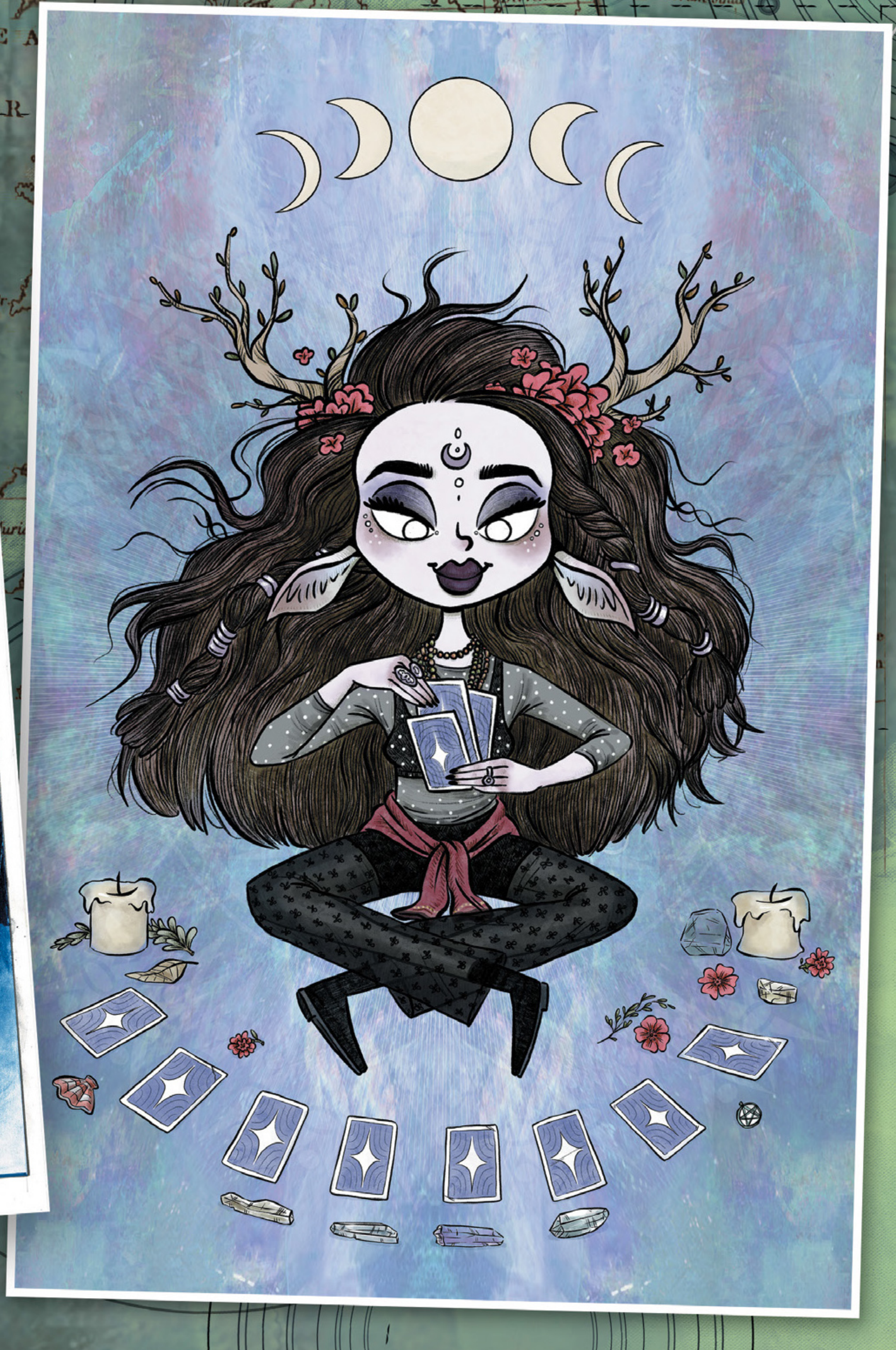


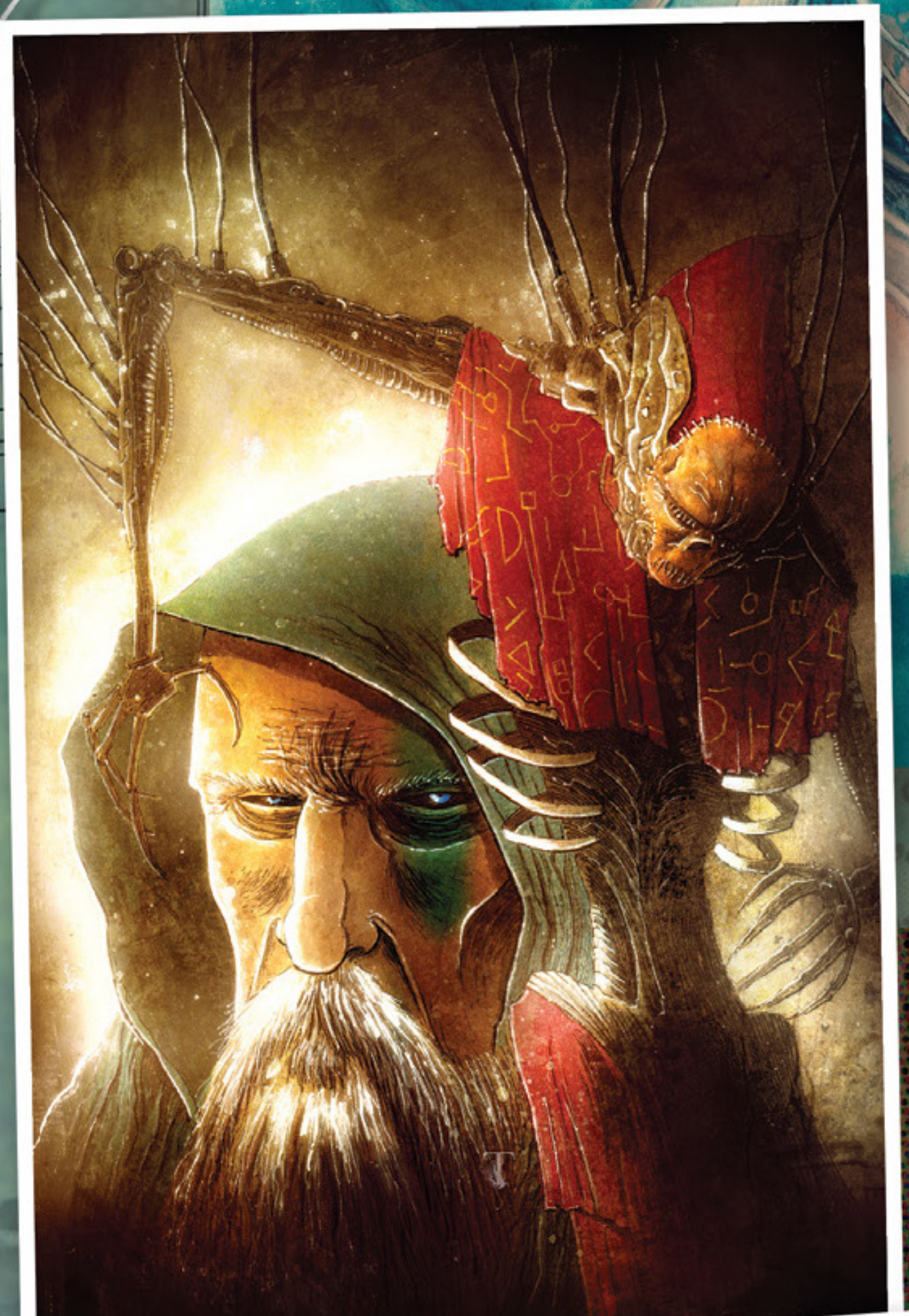

STARHENGE
BOOK ONE #1
LIAM SHARP

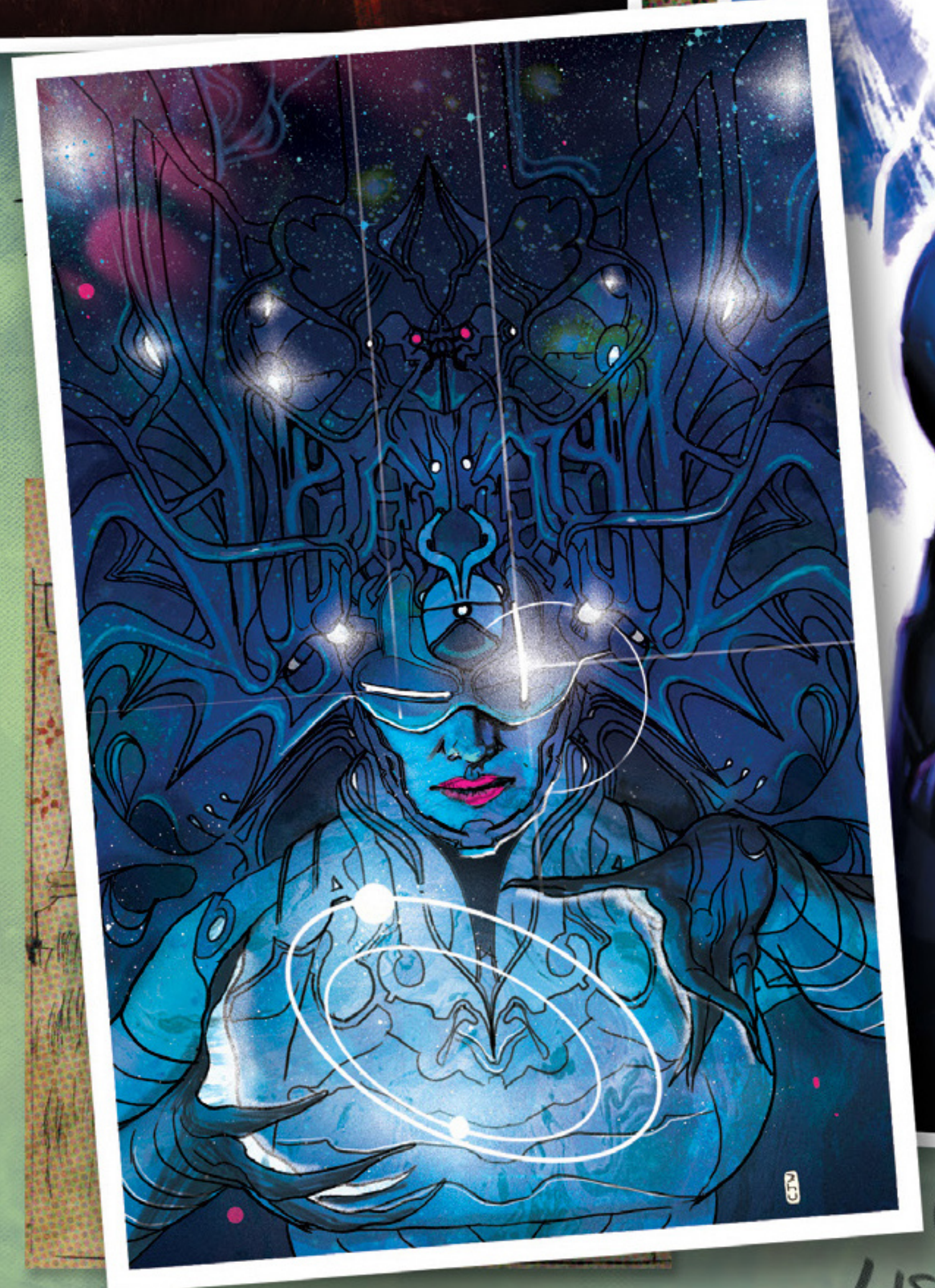


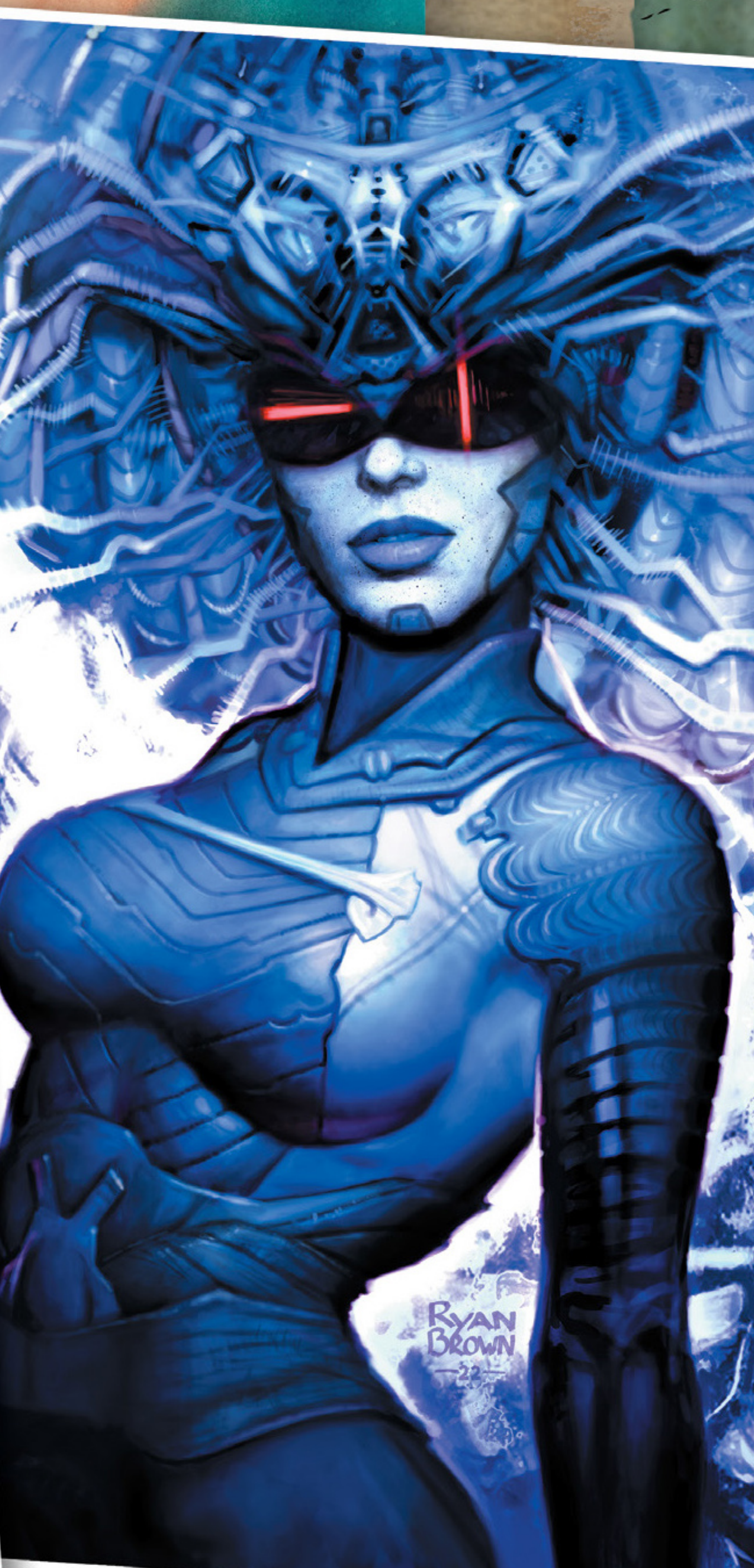


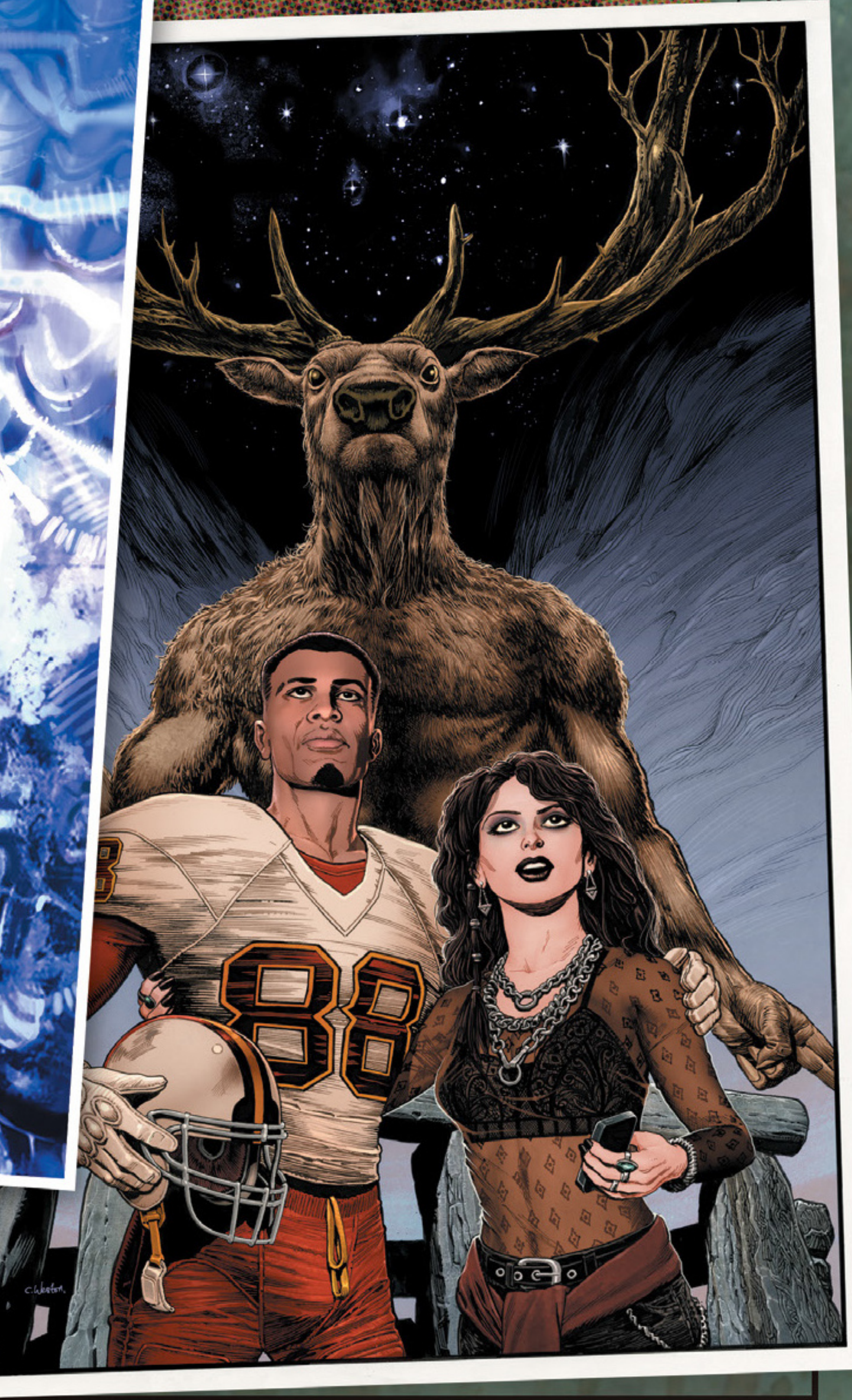












Variant cover gallery - top then bottom row:

Dave Kendall (#6), Liam Sharp (#1 FP), Liam Sharp (#1 SDCC, Image),
Ben Wolstenholme (#6), Sam Shearon (#6), Mike Perkins (#1)
Matylda McCormack-Sharp (#1), Ben Temple-Smith (#1)
Christian Ward (#1), Ryan Brown (#1), Chris Weston (#1).

(READING A LOOONG
LIST BY THE LOOKS OF IT!)

"STARHENGE is a heady brew, taking readers between the ancient Celtic world of the Arthur myth, the present day, and a war-torn dystopian future. Since Sharp's art is such a perfect fit for epic fantasy, it's a joy to see him add robots and spaceships into the mix as well." —***ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY***

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